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MISS MARY

BY KATHARINE TYNAN

AUTHOR OF "JOHN-A-DREAMS," "THE STORY OF KIT"
"THE WEST WIND," "ROSE OF THE GARDEN," ETC. ETC.

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MISS MARY

CHAPTER I

THE CONDEMNED CRIMINAL

The Vicomte de Luynes had arrived late at Castle Morrogh, where he was always a welcome guest. He had been shown into the drawing-room, where Sir Hugo de Burgh was reading aloud to his wife a book of memoirs which at the moment was delighting London. It was like Sir Hugo, after the greetings were done, to draw his old friend to sit down beside him and listen to what was being read. Lady de Burgh did not protest. She had an extraordinary devotion to her splendid-looking husband, and subordinated herself to him in a way which the Vicomte did not always approve. But then he had been in love with Lady de Burgh before her marriage, when she was Elizabeth Ashton and had refused him for the handsome Irish soldier. It said much for her—for the two men also—that her husband and her old lover were dear friends.

Sir Hugo thought the world and all of the Vicomte. No two men could be more unlike. Sir Hugo was just a simple, kindly soldier. If he had any weak-

ness in his character it was not apparent, except perhaps to the one or two who loved him best, and they did not love him the less for it. Some imaginative girl had said that his profile was like that of a knight on a tomb in some foreign cathedral —a famous effigy, looking upward, a happy warrior. He was not an intellectual man, whereas his wife was very intellectual. He did not always or often understand the things that delighted her—pictures, books, music—although he was content to take her word for what was good. He was interested in the memoirs to a great extent because he knew the people who moved through their lively pages.

The dressing-bell rang and apparently passed unnoticed. The Vicomte, watching Lady de Burgh, as he always did with a frank content in her presence and their reunion, noticed that she made a movement to rise and sat down again. He had often smiled, with a tender amusement, at Elizabeth's sense of order. She was one of the women who always keep appointments, answer letters, are never late for anything; the quiet composure of her face, with its delicate classical outline, the beautiful mouth, the pure outline of the cheeks, the light brown eyes, had the calm of her sense of order.

"Mon ami!" said the Vicomte, laying a long fine hand over Sir Hugo's, "the bell has sounded. I am travel-stained. Shall we postpone the delightful reading till after dinner?"

"To be sure," Sir Hugo replied, jumping up and letting the volume he had been reading fall to the ground with a clatter. Lady de Burgh stooped to

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NcU

lift it up, and the Vicomte stooping at the same time their hands met. They smiled at each other like well-assured friends. "What a stupid fellow I am!" Sir Hugo went on. "You've come a long journey. You'll want a bath before dinner. Plenty of time. Elizabeth always sees to it that the dressing-bell rings in good time. I'm so apt to go on with whatever I'm doing and keep the dinner waiting."

The Vicomte was in the Bachelors' Wing. He had had his bath and was just finished dressing. He was wearing the Star he kept for great occasions. It glittered on the black of his evening-clothes. A distinguished person looked back at him from the looking-glass, white-haired, black-moustached; fine black eyebrows above the bright eyes, fine skin, a shrewd, pleasant expression. You had but to give him a periwig and the clothes of the period, and he would have belonged to the Court of Louis Quatorze.

On his dressing-table there was a miniature of a child—a charming child with a mass of chestnut curls falling over her white frock, a mignonne face between the curls. The child's sleeves were tied up with green ribbon, showing her dimpled arms and shoulders. About her neck was a string of pearls. It was one of the many pictures the house contained of Mary, the little daughter of the house, who was at school at a very select Boarding School for the Daughters of Gentlemen, the principal of which, Miss Barnes, was Lady de Burgh's old governess.

"She grows prettier, the little one," M. le Vicomte said aloud, taking up the picture to examine it.

There was a knock at his door. No one came in answer to his bidding. He put down Mary's picture —Miss Mary, as she had called herself in babyhood, and the name had stuck—went to the door and opened it. There was an outside staircase from the first floor of the Bachelors' Wing by which one might go to the stables. The half-glass door was open. The wind that blew along the corridor set the lamps to flaring.

The boy who stood just within the corridor pulled his forelock by way of salute and stood staring at the Vicomte.

"I suppose you came in by the door," said the Vicomte. "Please go and shut it, or the lamps will be blown out. What a *courant d'air*! Ah, thank you." The boy had closed the door swiftly and come back again. "Just step in here." He motioned his visitor to enter the homelike, shabby room, where everything was old and had been very good once and still kept a faded air of distinction.

He could not sit down himself without inviting the boy who smelt of the stables to do so; it would have been contrary to his code of manners. He glanced at the faded roses of the gilt furniture and decided that it would not do to ask this handsome barbarous boy to sit down, so he stood himself.

"And what is it I can have the pleasure to do for you?" he asked, with an air of whimsical politeness. "To what do I owe the pleasure?"

"Please, sir, I had no right to come, but I could see you through your window from the stable-yard and I had to come. The door was open when I

pushed it. It is, sir, that Miss Mary wouldn't like it, if she was to know; and she so far away. She was always fond of the dogs. If I could have got a word with her Ladyship! It was Sir Hugo himself that gev the order, but it was Nixon destroyed the dog's temper. She was a quiet little thing before Nixon soured her, always kickin' her about the place."

"Wait!" said the Vicomte, quietly authoritative. "Let me understand. The dog you are speaking of —what dog is it? And what is going to happen to the dog? Nixon, I presume, is the head-groom. And what is it about Miss Mary?"

The Vicomte's English was good, but more gently deliberate than if it was his own tongue.

"Sit down there if you please, and tell me what is the matter." He had suddenly discovered that the picturesque-looking boy, with the fine dark complexion, the black hair, the look of race—it was only so the Vicomte could describe it to himself—was quite clean, although his clothes were rough. And the stable smell was very slight.

However, the boy remained standing. Now and again he glanced at the door over his shoulder, as though he was afraid some one would discover his presence in the room.

"It's the little spaniel, sir—Judy. You took notice of her the last time you were here. Nixon got a spite again' her, and was always kickin' and floggin' her. She's not safe now, sir—she has bitten the horses, even Malachy that is so gentle. Nixon was always wantin' Sir Hugo to let him shoot her. Bitin' Malachy was something the Master couldn't

forgive. So Nixon's to have his way at last. I could tell you things, sir." The black eyes leaped at him startlingly. "That Mr. Nixon's a brute. He's not fit to have to do with animals. If her Ladyship knew, or Sir Hugo! And Miss Mary loved Judy and would be nursin' her when she was a pup."

"You are, I think, the brother of Miss Roche at the Post Office?" the Vicomte said. He prided himself on never forgetting a face. "I have seen you before."

"Yes, sir, I am Maurice Roche. My sister wanted to send me to Dublin to school, but I'm so fond of the horses. I got taken on in the stables, and I've won a couple of races for Sir Hugo."

Suddenly the dinner-gong boomed through the house, rising to a roar and dying away again.

The Vicomte laid a hand on Maurice's shoulder.

"Be at ease," he said; "Judy shall not be shot."

"Thank you, sir; you won't say I came. The Master might be takin' it as a liberty my comin' into the house this way."

"I shan't betray you," the Vicomte assured him, and went out with his hand on Maurice's shoulder, to see him through the half-glass door and bolt it behind him.

After dinner the two men sat in the dining-room smoking. From the drawing-room there came the wailing strain of an old Irish song. If one watched very narrowly, one might have detected something in the Vicomte's manner as though he were drawn the way of the music, but he sat on, listening with careful politeness to Sir Hugo's country tales, not

particularly interesting, about the tenants who had been upset by the Land Bills with which the English were always threatening unfortunate Irish landowners; about the scandalous way the Game Laws were a dead letter in Ireland; about the mischief done by the bailiffs to landlord and tenant which gave those agitators a real handle against the landlords.

The Vicomte, putting aside his own preferences, drew him adroitly to talk of his stable, a subject about which, once set going, Sir Hugo had a deal to say. It kept him off his grievances: the readiness of the people to fall into the arms of the agitators, despite all the De Burghs had done for them; his denunciation of Parnell, who had deserted his own class and was a disgrace to it.

"Did that boy, Maurice Roche, turn out as well as you expected?"

"He did. I am usually right about people. He won me a couple of races last year. He rides no more than eight stone for all he's tall. There isn't an ounce of flesh on him."

"A beautiful boy—like a race-horse himself. What you call 'a bit of blood,' eh?"

"His great-grandmother was a peeress and came to singing ballads in the streets of Cork. They've come down in the world. Of course there's Spanish blood. His sister, Honoria—you remember Miss Roche at the Post Office? She's the fair Spaniard. Hair like ripe wheat and gold under the skin. She never married. Too proud to marry where she could. She doesn't like the boy riding my horses.

I'll send him to school as soon as the season's over. He has the blood of gentlemen."

The Vicomte allowed the topic of Maurice Roche to slip away as though it did not interest him.

"And your head-groom—Nixon, is it? Does he satisfy you?"

"I remember. He was new the last time you were here. Oh, I don't make mistakes. A most capable fellow. I never had things kept in such order. Old Byng was here the other day and said the stables were like English stables. He asked if the horses quite liked it.

"By the way"—he came to the topic to which the Vicomte had been leading up—"there's an execution to-morrow morning. You are just in time for it."

"An execution?"

A shade had fallen over Sir Hugo's good-natured face.

"Yes—a dog, Judy, a little spaniel. I hate killing a dog; but she's got to be perfectly ferocious. She looks dangerous, and she has bitten Malachy, the gentlest creature alive. It will be all over before you wake in the morning. By Jove, you should have seen the colour of her eyes, like two red lamps, as she crouched under the manger where she is tied. I would not let Nixon touch her. She looked to me as though she were going mad. The worst of it is that Mary is fond of her. I shan't dare tell her we shot Judy, and she'll miss her the minute she comes home. I go in terror of my little daughter."

"I do not like executions," said the Vicomte, slowly.

"Nor I; but what are you to do? She's not safe."

"Might I see her?"

"If you will."

"I flatter myself that I understand animals. I could tell you stories. But they may take too long in the telling. Let me see Judy."

Sir Hugo glanced towards the door by which the music made its delicate, mournful appeal.

"Not a word to my wife. She knows nothing about Judy. She would take it to heart."

"She need not know. Will you give an order for me to see the dog, at eleven o'clock in the corridor outside my bedroom? She can come up the outside staircase way."

"I will give the order. By the way, Nixon will not handle the dog. He says she is only safe with Maurice Roche. He came to me about it in my office just before you arrived. He wants the boy to take out Judy to be shot to-morrow morning. I asked him why not shoot her where she was; but he said my wife might ask the reason of a shot so near the house. It was very sensible of him."

"Ah!" The Vicomte's eyes flashed. "So the boy is to drag Judy to her doom?"

"How oddly you put it, De Luynes! I would not have consented if the little beast had not gone savage. Then I shall send word that Judy is to be brought to the Bachelors' Wing at eleven o'clock. I don't know what you expect to do. You're not a whisperer, are you?"

" A whisperer . . . ? "

The thing had to be explained to the Vicomte, who, all the time, heard through Sir Hugo's setting forth of the art of ' whispering ' the wailing Irish music which drew him, as he was always drawn, to the side of Elizabeth de Burgh.

CHAPTER II

THE HEART OF A DOG

At eleven o'clock Maurice Roche was standing outside the half-glass door of the Bachelors' Wing. The Vicomte was punctual. Something of pleasure came into the boy's dark eyes as the Vicomte appeared, at the far end of the long narrow corridor, coming nearer between the crimson walls, broken by white arches.

The Vicomte's noble head, his slight elegant figure, the gleaming of the star, the scarlet ribbon of his order, all pleased the boy's artistic sense, though he was quite unaware that he possessed such a quality.

"Well?" said the Vicomte, opening the half-glass door and fumbling for the monocle which he carried suspended by a silk cord about his neck. Having found it, he put it with deliberation to his right eye and gazed down intently upon something black which cowered and snarled on the white step.

"I wouldn't touch her, sir, if I was you," the boy said earnestly. "She's that miserable that she wouldn't know what she was doin', and maybe it's bitin' you she'd be."

"I do not think she would bite me, my friend," said the Vicomte; and felt something damp and warm moving about his silk stockings—the dog's nose. "But I make it a rule never to force a friendship which may not be desired. We shall see what Judy desires. Poor little lady! Will you bring her inside where I can see what she looks like?"

He opened the door of his room and motioned the boy to enter. A lamp was burning as well as the fire. He made an illumination of wax candles, before which Judy cowered in a snarling terror.

The Vicomte looked down at her, flat on all fours and growling. She had an immense chain attached to her. Her coat was staring. It ought to have been burnished jet.

"*Mon Dieu!* what a chain!" he said. "Take it off!"

"Nixon put it on her, sir. I heard him telling the Master that she was as savage as the Irish wolfhound in the Gardens up in Dublin. 'If you were to keep her,' he said, 'tis in a cage you'd have to shut her for the sake of the people she'd destroy. There's many a child does be comin' of a message to the stable-yard.' That settled it with Sir Hugo. He's terrible fond of children. The game-keeper's little girls do be runnin' all over the place."

While he spoke he was undoing the swivel catch of the big chain. As soon as the dog was free she bolted into a corner, and, getting as far back against the wall as possible, she growled. A queer greenish light came into her eyes. She certainly looked dangerous.

"Do you think Judy a wicked animal?" the Vicomte asked, turning to the boy. He was struck again by Maurice Roche's good looks, the grey eyes, almost black, the long dark lashes, the fine forehead, the grave dignified features, the soft black hair in a wave over the beautiful forehead. He said to himself that many a fine gentleman lacked the air of breeding which Maurice Roche possessed. There was something about him, the slender grace, the look of speed, almost of flight, the fine thin nostrils, that suggested a racehorse.

"She never hurt me," answered the boy. "I'm not afraid when she growls. She doesn't lick like other dogs. I think she's too unhappy in herself. It was the way that she was terrified of Nixon and bit him when she was small an' he took the whip to her. He did worse than that. She's got a few marks of burns about her. Nixon said it was an accident, she being in the forge where the horses were shoein'. I don't think 'twas an accident. It was a touch of the red tongs. Nixon swore he'd break her spirit. You might be givin' a hint to Sir Hugo, maybe? He's not the man to be with horses and dogs. That new mare now—he'll make her vicious. She's very young and but half-broken. He can't bear anything to stand up against him."

The Vicomte made a gesture of disgust. Then he said: "But it was time for me to make my visit. What would Miss Mary have said?"

"Miss Mary couldn't bear a cruel thing to be done to an animal," the boy answered, his eyes lighting up.

The clock in the stable-yard struck the quarter-past.

"And now good-night," said the Vicomte; and held out his hand. "Thank you very much for telling me. We must think of our beauty-sleep."

The boy's roughened hand lay a second in the Vicomte's, white and finely manicured. Maurice Roche had flushed at the Vicomte's handshake.

"But the dog, sir," he stammered. "Hadn't I better take her back again?"

"Leave her, please."

Light leaped to the boy's face.

"She's not goin' to be shot?" he said.

"Not if I can help it. If she was to be incurably wicked it might be necessary to shoot her. The right of the human comes first. If—*au contraire*—this poor little woman is the victim of man's cruelty I shall see what can be done. In any case I am very grateful to you."

The boy hesitated.

"You are goin' to keep her here, sir?"

"That is my intention. If she howls in the night it will not disturb the sleeping house. This wing is well out of the way. But I do not think she will howl."

"If she was to attack you, sir, when you were asleep? Her temper's been spoilt, you see."

"There is no danger. Now, thank you again, and good-night. You go home at night?"

"Yes, sir. My sister will think the fairies have got me. But I sent her word I'd be late."

The Vicomte saw Maurice Roche off the premises,

and waited a second or two, looking the way he had gone.

"That is a very fine boy," he said to himself. "A very fine boy. He ought not to be allowed to grow up a peasant. I must speak to Hugo about it."

He went back into his room. The dog made a rush at him, growling, and then retreated into her corner again. The baleful light still gleamed in her eyes. It seemed to be changing colour every minute.

The Vicomte drew a chair where he commanded Judy's corner.

"*Pauvre petite fille!*" he said with the utmost tenderness. Then he began a discourse truly Franciscan. He talked to the dog as though she could understand him. He had a beautiful voice, and his English speaking, clear, deliberate, had a quality all its own. He preached as St. Francis did to the birds, to the Wolf of Agobbio, as St. Anthony to the fishes. The dog flat against the earth, as though she prayed to the mountains to cover her, listened.

The Vicomte was a poet, for the elect. He had qualified by one slender volume of poems which had had no successor. Poetry was for the young, he said, when people reproached him for keeping back what would have delighted the world. Perhaps he had never written a more charming poem than his conversation with Judy at dead of night in the Bachelors' Wing of Castle Morrogh. Not a creature to listen to him except the dog, who, after a time, stretched her nose on her paws, and, turning a little sideways, drew a deep, heart-breaking sigh.

When after a time the Vicomte moved she got back again into her corner and lifted her lips from her fangs, snarling. He only went to the box of biscuits, which, with a lemon and sugar and a jug of water, offered him refreshment if he was wakeful at night.

He broke a biscuit in pieces and laid it on the carpet near the dog. He had observed the staring coat, the bloodshot eyes, the furrows tears had made in Judy's cheeks.

"Poor little woman!" he said again softly. Then he filled a dish with water and left it by the biscuits. After which he undressed and went to bed, taking no further notice of the dog.

He had blown out the lights. The moon was rising behind the pine copse that enclosed this side of the house and the stable-yard—acres of stables and stable-yard and out-buildings of various kinds. A subdued glow came in from the long narrow window at the foot of the Vicomte's bed, making the things in the room show as shadowy grey things. Presently as the moon got up higher and was able to pierce the layer of night-black shade in the pines, a long shaft of silver would come through and lie on the Vicomte's feet.

In the darkness there was a sound of a dog lapping water. The Vicomte lay very quiet, experiencing a disproportionate sense of satisfaction. The little woman was making herself at home. He knew that he had thought her dangerous when the two baleful lights glared at him from the corner. It struck him that the lapping of a dog was a very pretty sound.

something soft and silvery about it. Judy lapped delicately like a lady. He hardly dared to stir lest he should disturb her.

Next he heard her pushing about the bits of biscuit. He said to himself that she was a civilised dog at least. There was nothing of the savage, of the wild dog, about Judy's movements. Poor little woman ! How she must have suffered to look like that, to have come to the point of her hand against every man and every man's against her !

While she was pushing about the biscuits he heard the movement of the horses in the stables and remembered that Maurice Roche had spoken of a mare ill-treated by Nixon. The mare must be a new acquisition since his last visit. He abhorred cruelty. The cruelty to Judy and the mare had an added touch of horror because they were female things.

" If she had been brutalised," he thought to himself, " there would have been nothing else to do but to shoot her—through the flapping silky ear. *Pouf !* She would have gone out !

He felt an absurd satisfaction lying awake in the dark, listening to the crunching of the biscuits.

Presently he heard her retreat to her corner again. He hoped she would not be cold. The autumn nights had a touch of frost as the hours wore on. The turf fire, heaped prodigally earlier in the evening, had died down to white ash. He wished she would lie on the woolly rug before the fire or on the carpet. The bare floor must be very cold. Castle Morrogh was an old house ; and, despite the thickness of the walls,

there were many draughts, which lifted the carpets like the waves of the sea when the weather was wild, and found their way through hasped windows and closed shutters and drawn curtains. The wind, whistling through keyholes and crying in the great chimneys, wailed like a lost soul when it struck the south-western corner of the house and found a ventilator or something of the sort hidden behind the wall-paper on which it piped its melancholy tunes.

"Better let her be now," he said to himself and closed his eyes.

He must have been asleep for some little time, for the silver gleam had come and lay upon his bed. The night had turned to frost as he had expected. He put out his hand and drew up the quilt of down, covered in silk, which he had cast off earlier.

Only then did he realise that his movement had disturbed something. Judy must have been near him; she must have awakened him, sniffing against his face. She had dropped to the floor again with a soft plop of well-feathered paws.

He lay quiet, wondering if she would retreat to her corner or come again. Absurd! "Gaston de Luynes, thou art a fool!" he murmured to himself. "So much anxiety, excitement, about winning the heart of a dog, an outcast dog, one condemned to execution! Wilt thou ever learn sense?"

A few minutes passed. He lay so still that he could hear his own heart beating. It, or the pulses of his head, throbbed like a distant train against the deep pillow. He heard a small movement and lay

without opening his eyes. He knew that the dog's face was close to his; he could feel her breath. She was nosing now about his hand that lay outstretched and open. If she had been the savage they said she would have had a fine chance to maul him.

He lay, hardly daring to breathe. The dog moved away a little; then came back, and he felt a rough little tongue lick his hand.

He could have shouted with joy, like any foolish boy. "Gaston de Luynes, thou hast conquered!" he said in his thoughts. He half-opened his eyes. The dog's face was close to his; her ears trailed on the white sheet.

She was trying to get into the bed. Why, this was more than he had dared hope for. He had thought that it would be a long slow task to win her. He had very little doubt that she had understood his lecture, but had counted that she would need a course of lectures and much patience before she forgot what she had suffered and learnt to trust a man again. It had been incredibly easy—almost too easy, yet his heart swelled with pleasure. *La pauvre petite!* The feud had been only skin-deep. She had forgotten or forgiven already!

Judy made one or two attempts to spring on to the bed and fell back again. At the third attempt the Vicomte caught her. For a second her teeth were in his hand, but, apparently, it was only a momentary terror, for she had not bitten the skin, and when he had laid her down on the silk quilt she began licking the place vigorously. She was

miserably light and thin as he lifted her, and he felt the scars of her burns—but all that would pass.

His conquest was complete. He had won a heart that would be his till it ceased to beat.

CHAPTER III

SPANISH GOLD

TELLING this story afterwards the Vicomte had a formula. It always ended: "And so I lifted her to the duvet and there she has lain ever since."

Gaston de Luynes had been christened by a witty diplomat "The Little Brother of Europe." He was an honoured guest in the palaces of Europe and in circles even more exclusive. He was very much sought after, since to receive him as a guest was significant of social acceptance. Money could not entice him, nor any other quality save the choice ones which appealed to him. Yet he had a good many friends not at all highly placed. There was a story about a rich patron who had gone to buy a picture at the studio of a poor young artist; his hat had nearly fallen off his head when he recognised the Vicomte de Luynes painting away among half-a-dozen young fellows, a cigarette in his mouth. He had refused an Imperial Command when it would have interfered with a visit he paid every year to Canon O'Flanagan of Kilcrea, a witty, courteous old Irish priest whom he had met at St. Omer and taken into life-long friendship.

Canon O'Flanagan had received even more important visitors than the Vicomte. His reputation as a wit and the prince of hosts and good story-tellers had travelled far, so that many a one of the Great came and put his legs under Canon O'Flanagan's mahogany, was regaled with trout fresh from the river in its season, with boiled chickens and a bit of bacon, and went away in high delight with their host and the world.

The Vicomte was going to Kilcrea for a whole month after he was done with Castle Morrogh. For a whole month he would lie down at night and rise at morning in the priest's thatched house overlooking the falls of the river; and the sound of the cascade falling would be his sleepy song. He would live very simply and be waited on by a pink-frocked girl whose boots were still so strange to her that she made a tremendous noise in moving, as though she were always stumbling over them. Sometimes he and the Canon would walk up the long beech avenue to Castle Creagh and dine with the Earl—Lord Corrib—or he would dine with them and they would play a game of dominoes afterwards, during which Canon O'Flanagan and the Earl talked of the affairs of the people, and the Vicomte listened with a bright amused gaze while he moved his dominoes hither and thither.

For nine years yet Judy was to accompany the Vicomte wherever he went. However, the nine years of perfect companionship had but begun. The Vicomte arrived in the dining-room for breakfast the morning after his conquest with a transfigured

Judy at his heels. He had washed her in his bath, and her coat still shone from the water, and was redolent of the fine sweetly-scented soap which the Vicomte himself used.

Judy came in delicately, a little timorous. There was no one in the room. It was a fine autumn morning; the French window stood open on to the sunny lawn, the grey dews of the night glittered on the grass and the long shadows of the trees lay across it. A fire of turf and wood blazed on the open hearth, under the marble mantelpiece, beautifully carved with a group of Eros and Psyche and lifted on two noble pillars of marble. The silver kettle was singing over the spirit lamp. Lady de Burgh was not yet in her accustomed place. Judy and the Vicomte had appeared before their time.

There was a pile of letters by the Vicomte's plate. He was a great letter-writer. While he was reading them Judy crept over and lay down on the rug before the fire.

Presently Lady de Burgh came in. His eyes went to meet hers with a flash of pleasure.

"Good morning, Gaston," she said. "I hope I have not kept you waiting."

"But you are punctuality itself," he answered, and opened yet another letter with the tiny jewelled paper-cutter he had brought out of his waistcoat pocket. "I hope you slept well."

"Not so well. I was distressed last night. . . . My husband told me . . ."

Her eyes caught sight of the dog lying on her side

on the white skin rug, watching her with a furtive air.

"Why, it is Judy!" she said. "Hugo told me that she must be shot. He had not meant to tell me. I was awake in the early morning listening for the shot. How I hated it! How I dreaded having to tell Mary! What does it mean?"

"Only that Judy has adopted me." The dog, hearing her name in the conversation, got up and wriggled her way under the table, where she dropped with a heavy sigh at the Vicomte's feet. "I do not think Hugo will object to my having her. She is rather miserable now; but there is nothing Time will not set straight."

"I am so glad. I could not understand how Judy, such a dear little dog as she was, should have become wicked. But Hugo assured me that she was really dangerous. And there are so many children coming and going, and our Irish children are so intrepid with animals. Oh, Gaston, I hope you did not think us very cruel. I am sure Hugo thought her dangerous. How could he have been so mistaken?"

At the moment the kettle hissed and boiled over. While Elizabeth made the tea, the Vicomte glanced at her and away again. She had chocolate rings about her eyes this morning as though her head ached. He knew that she had wept for Judy's fate.

Sir Hugo had been out cubbing since dusk of the morning and came in with a glorious appetite. The story of Judy had to be told to him. He did not ask many questions, being too hungry to talk. Pre-

sently he lifted the table-cloth to look at Judy, stretched at the Vicomte's feet.

"I'm glad the little brute wasn't shot," he said. "For one thing I didn't like the account I should have to render to Mary. I'm very glad you charmed her back to her right mind. She seemed very dangerous when I saw her tied up in the stables yesterday. You certainly are a whisperer, Gaston."

After breakfast the Vicomte and Lady de Burgh went out with the dogs, Judy keeping very close to her new master's heels. Sir Hugo had to attend the Petty Sessions at Drum, and might be kept there till the afternoon, as there were a number of licensing cases. They went round by the path running under the stable-walls, and by the high orchard wall, taking the field path that led through the woods to Castle Lambert village and Mount Lambert Post Office on the dune above the village. When they had passed by the stable-yard a man in groom's dress came out and stood looking after them. It was Nixon. He was a lean, dark man with a morose expression and a curious look in the eyes, "a mad eye" said a stable helper who had suffered from his iron discipline.

His face was not pleasant as he stared after them. He had a gun in his hand, which he had been cleaning. The unconscious two moving on under the trees, flecked with light and shade, might have been startled if they had looked back and seen him. As it was only Judy was aware of her enemy. She pressed closer to the Vicomte, almost causing him to stumble over her, and growled nervously.

They were a distinguished-looking couple. Lady

de Burgh dressed usually in black, very rarely putting on colours. She was uncommonly tall, and her garments trailed unless she lifted them. Over her black hat she wore a long veil, mantilla fashion. Ornaments she had none, except the pearl necklace and small earrings without which she was seldom seen.

The soft shadowy black made an admirable setting for her clear milky complexion and the russet-coloured hair and eyes. When she was animated and her eyes sparkled, they were a light hazel, with something of a greenish tint. The hair, very fine and curling, had not begun to show a tinge of grey. An Englishwoman by birth, she had learned to love Ireland more than the Irish, and her one living child had inherited the passion. While she talked to the Vicomte she was at her best. She talked to her husband in terms which did not give him any trouble; but with Gaston de Luynes it was a constant and delightful meeting of intellects. Perhaps Sir Hugo de Burgh only knew his wife in her restful moods. He had sometimes been bewildered by a swift, playful parry and thrust between her and his friend. When they saw that he was puzzled they went back to simple speech and matters.

Elizabeth de Burgh was talking brilliantly as though she had not talked simplicities all the year round. Her face, uplifted, showed her pure profile and that outline of cheek and throat which it was a thousand pities age should ever wither and make flaccid. The sunlight had caught and gilt little loose curls of her hair till they shone like the colour of the pheasant.

They were on their way to visit Honoria Roche, Maurice's sister, who had kept the post-office since the death of her old grandmother. Honoria was a very remarkable person, almost as remarkable in her way as Lady de Burgh herself. It was wonderful how she contrived to satisfy herself at the little post-office, where so few and trifling things happened day after day. She had spent a year or two in Spain a good while ago now. It puzzled other people besides Lady de Burgh that Honoria could content herself with the uneventful life; but it was no puzzlement to Elizabeth de Burgh that Honoria had chosen to come back to Ireland from Spain.

Everyone knew there was Spanish blood in the Roches; but whereas in Maurice it had made for dark skin, hair and eyes, Honoria was the Spanish blonde, a very splendid type of colour. Her eyes were the bluest blue, her complexion had the deep underlying gold of ripe corn; her hair was a deep gold. Honoria had passed her thirtieth birthday. If she had been a Spaniard living in Spain she would have begun to go off or would have gone off. Not being a Spaniard living in Spain, but in the moist Irish air, her beauty was unfaded. It had a certain opulence: she was a big woman with a soft flowing roundness of contour, something maternal in her air. A thousand pities she should not marry; but she seemed little likely to do that. She had had one or two intrepid suitors from the farming and shop-keeping class into which it ought to have been promotion for her to marry; but as a rule the bachelors and widowers of the neighbourhood accepted tacitly

that Honoria was not for them: and she seemed likely enough to settle down into spinsterhood.

She had her post-office outside the village on a sandy strip of land overlooking the sea. She liked her solitude. She had a dog, an Irish terrier named Michael Malony, a goat, a couple of kids, and a sure-footed little mountain cow which picked up a precarious living on the grass of the sand-dunes and the cliffs. There was also a cat named Peter which Maurice had brought home to his sister a starveling kitten with the bones protruding. Now Peter was sleek and comfortable.

Honoria's post-office and the adjoining cottage were white-washed brilliantly. They were so full of the sea and the sea-wind that in one of the bare little rooms you might have been on the deck of a ship. At the back of the post-office you looked between a pair of lace window-curtains and saw that there was a garden, which might be supposed to have a precarious foothold clinging to the rock and sand, in a sheltered dip of the dunes. Honoria's garden, as a matter of fact, grew the best early potatoes and peas and strawberries in the county. A lot of industry had gone to the making and keeping of it, but it was now a source of profit to Honoria, who, with the help of her garden and the milk of her cow and occasionally a summer boarder, managed to eke out the scanty official salary which went with the keeping of Mount Lambert Post Office.

The three met like old friends. Honoria ushered her visitors into her bright sitting-room—the brighter because of the sweet-peas in lustre jugs, and the

roses, from the great bush which Honoria's grandmother had coaxed to grow over the porch of the post-office, in a blue bowl. The smell of the sea in the room was almost overborne by the luscious sweetness, that came in at the open window, of the great clumps of pink and white phlox which stood round the cottage walls between the hollyhocks.

The visitors sat down. Honoria preferred to stand by the window so as to keep an eye on Johanna and Josephine, the two kids, who were fast approaching the tethering age and were always getting into mischief.

"You won't mind if I make a dart now and again," Honoria said. "The kids root up everything on me. I can't keep a bush or a shrub with them."

Leaning by the window, with the cat on her shoulder, she made an effect of gold in the warm white room. The Vicomte eyed her with approval. He had a project of bringing a great French portrait painter, famed for audacious colour effects, to paint Honoria with a kid in her arms—if only Johanna and Josephine would abate their growth for a while—the cat on her shoulder, and Michael Malony looking up with that agony of jealousy in his faithful brown eyes.

"M. le Vicomte only came last night, Honoria," Lady de Burgh said, "so he has lost no time about coming to see you."

"Maurice was telling me—about the dog. Surely to goodness it wouldn't be her that's lying there by you, sir?"

"This is Judy," the Vicomte said, with a proud

air. "She is not very handsome yet, poor child, but she will be in a little while!"

"Maurice thinks the world of you, sir. 'Tisn't alone saving the dog, though he'd give his life for an animal any day at all. I never saw a boy so mad about animals. But it was the thought of what Miss Mary would say when she came home that was vexing him. 'You take care of Judy till I come back, Maurice,' she said. 'Twas the same with all the live-stock. Maurice ought to be at school, my Lady, only he thinks he's bound to see after Miss Mary's animals for her. He has her guinea-pigs under his bed this minute."

Lady de Burgh smiled. There was something about her which had been puzzling Honoria since she came in, something of a bubbling excitement, very unlike her usual calm.

"Oh, but that won't do, Honoria," she said. "Maurice is a very fine boy, and his education must not be neglected because of Mary's pets. Perhaps you won't be surprised to hear that M. de Luynes has taken a great fancy to Maurice. He has a proposal to make about him, which I hope you will agree to."

The Vicomte's proposal was that he should charge himself with Maurice's education and maintenance for a term of years.

While he made it, while they debated it, Lady de Burgh said nothing, her quick gaze going from one face to the other. She could hardly have told whether she admired more the Vicomte's way of conferring a benefit or Honoria's manner of receiving it. She wished it could have been painted—by Sargent, for

example, with his eye for the dramatic. The Vicomte's gestures and courtesies, Honoria's beautiful placid manner of acceptance, were well worth perpetuation.

"Well, to be sure," she said to herself—"anything at all may happen in Ireland, excepting only the obvious and the expected."

CHAPTER IV

A CASTLE IN SPAIN

From the window of the post-office, which gave light to Honoria when she made up the bags and affixed the official seals, a ruin standing out on the cliffs against the sky-line was plainly visible.

Lady de Burgh used to say it explained Honoria. It was the old castle of the Roches to which Sir James Fitzmaurice Roche had brought his Spanish bride in the seventeenth century. There had been alliances since then. Honoria's great-grandfather had sought out some of his Spanish relatives and had found one of the name growing wines and exporting them from Cadiz. He had taken root in Spain and married the wine-grower's daughter, had made wine himself and money, and been reduced to poverty by the phylloxera ravaging the vineyards several years in succession; so that he had returned home sad and impoverished, with one black-eyed boy who had become in time the grandfather of Honoria and Maurice.

Honoria's Spanish strain went further back than the Cadiz wine-grower's daughter, said Lady de Burgh to the Vicomte. That Spanish blonde colour-

ing must have come down to her from the Spanish Lady Roche of the seventeenth century.

And there across the dunes stood the ruin, ever in Honoria's line of vision, to remind her of the fine people she had sprung from. How could she have adapted herself to altered circumstances and consented to a sensible marriage with a farmer or a shopkeeper, with the old ruin always there to remind her of the ancient glories ?

Some four years had passed since that day on which the Vicomte and Lady de Burgh had come to Mount Lambert Post Office with the proposition for Maurice which Honoria had accepted gratefully, but with a manner that conferred a favour rather than received one.

Honoria stood in the doorway of the post-office one fine day, and gazed across the dunes the way messengers from the world arrived at Mount Lambert.

The plateau over which she was looking dipped steeply not many yards away. What seemed like clumps of bushes to short-sighted eyes were tree-tops the roots of which grew in the valley below that steep dip. Over them hung a cloud of greenish bluish smoke, the smoke of Castle Lambert village in the hollow burning the turf on all its open hearths.

Any vehicle arriving at Mount Lambert Post Office would climb the hillside by a zig-zag track, making Honoria aware of its approach in the first instance by the horse's nose appearing over the ridge. Then the horse would come in sight and the driver and the car, and having surmounted the ridge all would arrive at the post-office with a gay clatter of harness

as the horse trotted briskly over the springy earth of the dune.

To be sure it was very seldom that anyone came except on foot, but to-day was the first day of the week in which Honoria might expect Maurice—Maurice done with school and going up to Oxford with a scholarship.

The thing that was exercising her mind as she stood with her hand over her eyes, staring away towards the verdigris-coloured smoke and the blue mountains beyond the bronze and blue of the bogs in the far distance, was whether Maurice would stay with her or at Castle Morrogh.

Castle Morrogh might be better. The cottage was small and had disadvantages. Maurice would be wanting a bath every morning. How on earth could she get water heated for a bath on the prodigal scale required by the male creature? Also, she doubted her ability to give him satisfactory meals. She herself ate little but vegetables from her garden which she knew how to dress with a French delicacy learnt in her convent school, eggs, tea, home-made bread, and fruit when she could get it. It did not seem worth while to provide more than these easily prepared things for one woman's consumption. Honoria usually ate her simple meals with a book in her hand, being called away at intervals to attend to the duties of the post-office.

She pulled herself up in the midst of her reflections with a reminder that the person whose meals she was considering was Maurice; Maurice, who had been hers from the time the mother died, when she

was fourteen and Maurice a year old; Maurice, the shock-haired boy, who had been at her beck and call all the years of his growth; had cut wood for her, fetched water, looked after the animals, and dug in the garden when he was not at the Christian Brothers School over at Breagh, two miles off by the dunes.

She had just got rid of Esther Murphy who had come to have a few words written to her daughter in America. The old woman had gone off vastly offended because Honoria absent-mindedly had congratulated her on looking so well. "Indeed, all the health I've got is outside my skin," she had said, and had departed talking to herself.

The September sky was quite golden behind Shamus's Castle, as the old ruin was called.

It was rather unfortunate, Honoria thought, that her mind being so obsessed with Maurice she had forgotten how Esther enjoyed her ailments. She was fond of old people and sympathised with their oddities. It was very stupid of her. She must make a brew of tansy tea for the old woman's winter cough and so placate her.

She was watching so intently that the distance became a blur. And after all Maurice might not come to-day, nor to-morrow. He had to wait in London for the Vicomte who had been staying at the Embassy at St. Petersburg—not yet Petrograd. Maurice had not been home for four years. Honoria understood. The Vicomte wished the gap to be as wide as possible between the boy who had worked about the stables at Castle Morrogh and the Maurice

Roche whom he had educated with a view to his being a companion-secretary to him presently, while he waited for a career. Honoria understood the Vicomte ; but she thought she understood the people better than he did. Maurice coming home in the garb of a gentleman, slender and elegant as he appeared in the photographs which had comforted her for his absence, need fear no reminder of his former condition from the people. They would remember that the Roches had the good blood in them and accept the altered condition of affairs.

Honoria, as she turned about, became aware that Josephine, a more than matronly Josephine by this time, had pulled up her tether, and was standing on all fours against the porch, eating the leaves of the Gloire de Dijon, now and again with an impatient tug bringing the wet roses down in showers.

Honoria flew. Josephine, as though it were a frolic, and herself a kid, eluded her. She had a couple of great-grand-children who were named Julia and Cordelia. Poor Johanna had died in childhood of a chill, in the same sad month when Peter, the kitten, had been killed by a ruffianly mongrel from the village in Michael Malony's absence. But Josephine leaped like a kid, and Julia and Cordelia, with little bleats like new babies, quitted their grazing on the dune and came plunging with side-way jumps into the last of the sweet-peas.

Honoria pursued Josephine, who was a past-mistress in turning and twisting. Her chain trailed after her. Now and again Honoria had all but seized the chain only to have it whisked from her again.

And meanwhile Julia and Cordelia had caught the spirit of the thing and were butting at each other, their budding horns wreathed like Pan's in the trailing vines of the sweet-peas.

Honoria, in her solitude, had kept very young. She often frolicked with the animals, and had been discovered sometimes in the act by a grave-eyed child wanting a penny stamp, whose solemnity was a rebuke to the mature Honoria—or it might be an old woman with a critical eye and a caustic smile. Once it was Esther Murphy, who remarked: "Sure God help you, and all them of little wit!"

Michael Malony, a little grimmer than he had been four years ago, had been watching the game wistfully from the porch. He knew he was not supposed to chase the goats, but with Honoria in such evident good-humour—she was laughing and one of the great coils of her corn-coloured hair had got free and fallen into loose gold about her face—he could contain himself no longer, and he too rushed at Josephine.

It was at this moment that Honoria became aware of someone coming over the crest of the hill. It was not Maurice, but a much older gentleman, someone strange to these parts, a visitor at Castle Morrogh perhaps.

"I am so sorry, sir," Honoria said, meeting him, and trying to twist up the golden rope of her hair with her two hands. "The goat has escaped and will destroy everything. And look at the destruction those rascals are doing! Michael! Michael!"—to the terrier—"you must not do that. Come here,

sir, at once. You will drive Josephine into the sea."

"You desire to catch the goat," said the new-comer, speaking slowly, with a foreign intonation.

Honoria, securing the golden coil, turned her eyes to rest upon his face with a grave regard. She was struck at once by his likeness to a picture, presumed a Velasquez, which was one of the treasures of Castle Morrogh. A Spaniard, of course.

Long ago, when she was young, the nuns had sent her out as nursery governess to the children of a great Spanish family. She had met with some stately and dignified Spanish gentlemen in those days at Barcelona. She remembered when their courtesy to her had almost hurt, giving her a sense of loneliness, for the very exquisiteness of the courtesy was due to her position as a dependent and a stranger. She had adored the family, especially the gracious lady who represented to her the essential loveliness of the mother, so warm and tender to her enchanting brood—but, after all, she had not counted. She might have lived with them all her days if she would, for they had liked her, but she would never have had any chance of making a place for herself. Mount Lambert Post Office was better. She would have stifled at Barcelona. She remembered the Marchesa's rebuke when a young lieutenant of guards had offered Honoria a civility. "In Spain we exact from those who are with our daughters the utmost of discretion."

This Spanish gentleman had perhaps been much outside Spain. He had perhaps an admixture of

island blood. His grave dark eyes regarded her with a serious friendliness. He was as lean as Don Quixote, and the face would have been rather sad in repose. Now his lips smiled, and there was a curious sweetness in the smile.

Honoria concluded rapidly that it was preposterous to expect such a person to run after Josephine, to bring reason to the minds of Julia and Cordelia. And yet—the cut of his clothes perplexed her. She had known nothing like them in Spain. And in his accent there was something not altogether Spanish.

"But, yes, if you would be so kind," she said, and her eyes were full of laughter—"because, you see, sir, I must attend to my duties."

A small boy had gone into the post-office with a parcel which required the affixing of stamps. By the time it was done and Honoria had emerged into the open air the Spanish gentleman was coming across the dune, leading Josephine by the chain. Julia and Cordelia had returned to their cropping of the grass and Michael Malony was sidling towards the post-office with a guilty and wheedling air.

Honoria took the chain from the stranger's hand. She found a wooden mallet.

"Now for the stake," she said. "We shall have to find the stake and hammer it in well. Just look how she has torn down the rose-tree!"

The stake was found. The Spaniard, with a gently masterful air, took the mallet and the stake, and hammered it in: secured Josephine anew. This done, he set about nailing up the rose-tree on to the wall.

The time was approaching for Honoria to make up the bag of mails. There were three letters, a postcard, and a parcel for this afternoon's bag. Presently Jerry Walsh would come over the edge of the dip to fetch away the bag to Cloona station. After that Honoria would call the cow, completely out of sight now, to come home to be milked. The cow was a great pet, and would come frolicking heavily to her mistress's call. Honoria would milk her in the little shed, give her an armful of hay and a pail of water and leave her for the night. There would be some watering to be done in the garden. The sandy soil was very arid.

This strange gentleman seemed to have infinite leisure. Where had he come from to Honoria's lonely kingdom? People often wondered why the post-office should be such a climb from the village and in so lonely a spot. She began to consider if this fine gentleman, with the dreamy honest eyes, whose picturesqueness the oddly-cut grey clothes could not spoil, was an apparition, or perhaps someone a bit mad.

"Oh, but," she said, "you will have business at the post-office which you have forgotten about. It was so kind of you to help me with the goat."

She smiled to herself, a rich enjoying smile, at her memory of the Don's—yes, she had suddenly found the name for him—the Don's sad and serious countenance as he had tugged along the unwilling Josephine.

"It is not the post-office," he said—"it is *that*."

He pointed directly at the ruin on the cliff, standing

black against the primrose sky, its jagged battlements showing out sharply.

"I have been told I should find it," he said. "I am a Fitzmaurice from Spain. Long ago we went to Monterey, but we have remained Fitzmaurices from Spain. This is the Fitzmaurice country. And that is"—he pointed a long finger—"the cradle of my people."

She began to understand. He must be a descendant of one of the three sons of Sir James Fitzmaurice who had flown away with the Wild Geese and never returned. And so—some of them had gone to California. The American-cut clothes, the speech which had something—just an intonation—grafted on to the slow, dignified speech of the Spaniard. She saw it all plainly now.

"I believe," she said, "that we must be cousins, for I too claim *that* as the cradle of my family. My name is Honoria Fitzmaurice Roche."

He took her hand and lifted it to his lips, with an air of homage she found very sweet and pleasant.

"My dear cousin," he said, "I have not found anyone so beautiful since my Pilar died."

CHAPTER V

A WORLDLY WOMAN

Castle Lambert had hardly time to get over the wonder of the strange foreign gentleman who had put up at the Lambert Arms—where no one ever came except a school inspector, a government official of one kind or another, or a few unassuming anglers in the season—before it had to welcome young Morry Roche, incredibly altered. He was now Mr. Fitzmaurice Roche, a real gentleman to look at and in his manners ; and so friendly, said the neighbours, with whom he was quite willing to exchange reminiscences of the old days.

Maurice and the Vicomte might be seen walking together any day, the elder man, who began to be a little feeble, leaning on the younger as though he had been his son. But for all his new grandeur Maurice forgot no one. It was wonderful how he remembered. It showed the good blood, said the people, that he should not be haughty, should not pretend to forget.

Still it was sufficiently wonderful to have Morry Roche, who used to help in the stables and ride Sir Hugo's horses, staying as a guest at Castle Morrogh

and walking and riding about with Miss Mary. The people so adored Miss Mary that there was hardly anyone they would have thought good enough for her. Now and again a murmur was heard from someone that Morry, for all he had good blood, should remember that only for the French gentleman he would be touching his hat to Miss Mary, not talking and laughing with her, as the people often saw them.

"Miss Mary was always humble," they said. "Sure she was in and out of the cabins from the time she could get about alone, and feeling the trouble that happened to us as though it was her own, and making pets of the children and sewing little frocks for them as soon as she could use a needle. "Didn't the darlin' head of her bring the shining sun into the house when there was sickness or sorrow ?" one asked poetically, referring to Miss Mary's wonderful head of red-gold curls. Her Ladyship had never kept her child out of the cottages as another lady might have done. She had not been afraid of the darling only child picking up this or that. Sure her Ladyship, though she was English, had a great wish for the Irish always.

Mary had gone up the hill and learnt embroidery from Honoria Roche at the post-office. I have omitted before this to describe Honoria's wonderful embroidery, that extraordinary rich blend of colours like old stained glass which she worked into pictures, pictures of woods and gardens and cathedral aisles and cottages, and the old ruin with the sky behind it, and countless other things. Lady de Burgh had said that Honoria worked into her embroidery the life she ought to have had and could not have. But

Lady de Burgh was always fantastic and often above even people as " quick at the up-take " as the Irish.

Miss Mary had learnt the embroidery from Honoria as she had learnt the lace-making at the Nuns' School for lace-making over at Breagh. More than one poor baby had had a christening robe trimmed with real lace made by Miss Mary's own hands, and more than one of the enchanting flaxen-haired pink-cheeked children had their smocks embroidered by her. She never thought anything too good for the children. In that she was her mother's own daughter.

But one thing the people remembered most of all about Miss Mary. It was her love for the country. She had inherited from her English mother that passion for Ireland which is often the deepest, the most intense, when it enters an English heart. Ireland had put the *comether*—that is to say, the spell—on Elizabeth de Burgh. She was more Irish than the Irish. This tenderly-loved country she called it to the Vicomte, her voice lingering over the words. Miss Mary had talked to the children about Ireland and its history. She would repeat Irish poetry for them by the yard.

There had been a day when Sir Hugo had said to his wife: " You'll make that child a rebel, Elizabeth." Lady de Burgh had only smiled, going on with the thing she was doing, which was embroidering a dainty kerchief of silky lawn with green shamrocks for her little girl.

Judy, who had come back for the first time since his promotion, was much prouder than Morry, said the people, for she was very stand-off when anyone

claimed acquaintance with her. She was now clipped and brushed and burnished; and she wore little clanking bracelets on her ankles and a scarlet ribbon at her collar. Her old enemy, Nixon, had long been an inmate of a Criminal Lunatic Asylum. Apparently she had no memories of him till, wandering one day at the Vicomte's heels into the stable-yard at Castle Morrogh, she had fled with every sign of excessive fear and could not be persuaded to return.

No one knew better than Honoria how little Maurice was changed. She forbade his doing many things for her because it would spoil his beautiful clothes. Maurice *would* climb up the hill, shining in clean flannels from a hotly-contested game of lawn-tennis, to do all sorts of what the Don called quaintly "household chores"; he would dig in the garden and lop and prune; he would write the old woman's letters instead of Honoria, and carry water, and chop wood, in a way that proved his simple heart unchanged

He seemed to have found it very easy to drop into the new way of life. He and the Vicomte were to spend the last week of September and the first week of October between Canon O'Flanagan at Kilcrea and Lord Corrib. Michaelmas term at Oxford began about October 10, which would give time for these visits. Meanwhile Maurice divided his hours very impartially between Castle Morrogh and Mount Lambert Post Office.

The Don, as other people besides Honoria had learnt to call him, otherwise Mr. Antonio Herrera Fitz-maurice, was doing some strange things which stimulated the interest of the county in him. He had

explored long ago the old castle of the Fitzmaurices; had been shocked at its disrepair and the cattle wandering through the ruin as though it were consecrated ground. He intended enclosing it with railings when he should have set all in order. Within a very few days of his arrival he had bought the stretch of cliff and the old ruin, which were of very little good to anyone. He was buttressing the walls and clearing away the debris of the centuries. In the open lower story, where the cattle used to wander in and out, he was having flower-beds made and planted.

"But," objected Sir Hugo, coming to see how the Don's work was progressing, "you cannot always stay here, man. Who is to look after the thing when you go back to your own country? You may pay someone to do it, but who's to ensure its being done?"

"What's the matter with me?" asked Honoria, in a phrase picked up from the Don, who used the American slang with the air of the Cid Campeador. The Vicomte, who was also present, remarked afterwards to Lady de Burgh that the Don had sent his cousin a long gaze, full of meaning, in answer to this remark and she had not avoided it.

"A glorious creature," said the Vicomte. "She should reign in a palace."

"Perhaps she may," Lady de Burgh returned. "I believe Mr. Fitzmaurice is very rich."

For a month or more Maurice had had Miss Mary pretty much to himself. There were very few neighbours, and the few were long distances apart. So the two young people played lawn-tennis, and gardened,

and rode and walked, and visited the cottages together: and no one seemed to be troubled about it except Horonia. There was an occasion on which Honoria had drawn Maurice to her as though he was the little boy of old; had asked him questions about Miss Mary; had said cryptic things about the unworldliness of Lady de Burgh; had asked him what he intended to do when he left the University, because it was well known that the Vicomte, for all he was such a grand gentleman, had no money to spare. All this caused bewilderment and a vague discomfort in the mind of the boy, who forgot it all presently when he was alone with Mary.

There had been no visitors at Castle Morrogh for those happy weeks. There were but three or four days left of the good time when Lady de Burgh's cousin, Lady Damer, arrived with her maid and her dog and her parrot and her jewel-case and an extraordinary amount of luggage for such a quiet visit. But, of course, she was *en route* for Scotland, where there would be a big country house-party.

Lady Damer was known in society as a very agreeable woman when she liked. When she did not like she could be insolent. She had a way of taking up people and dropping them, which had earned her some enmities. She talked of herself as a woman of the world, and others said she was a worldly woman. She had a somewhat fixed smile and an acutely observing and, at will, belittling eye; but she was popular with men, whose weaknesses she said she made a study of: and she was too wise in her generation to neglect women unless they crossed

or displeased her. So she was to be met with everywhere that was worth going to, and had earned for herself the reputation of being a very exclusive hostess.

The day she arrived Lady de Burgh was not well and Sir Hugo was attending one of his innumerable Boards; so Mary offered to drive in the carriage to meet Lady Damer. The train, which was an express and fancied itself very much as a fast train, only stopped at Breagh by signal to set down or take up. Then it went off to the West with a long scream and much belching of black smoke, barely giving passengers time to alight. The last time Lady Damer had paid Castle Morrogh a visit the parrot had all but been carried on, and she had been extremely annoyed at the stupidity of Irish railways.

"I shall have to collect all her little parcels while poor Baines goes off to snatch the luggage from the van. I wish I hadn't to call the poor woman Baines. Why not Jane? It sounds so inhuman."

"Shall I be of any use?" Maurice asked.

"You would be of considerable use," Mary said. "I don't know how a man knows everything about luggage and trains and travelling. It's born in them, I suppose. There's Papa—you remember when we went to Rome, darling?"—Lady de Burgh was always "darling" to her daughter—"how Papa personally conducted us, and led the way through the strange towns?—how he walked into the big railway stations and knew where to get the tickets, and never once made a mistake about the trains—all the time being faultlessly ignorant of French or Italian? It was wonderful, was it not, darling?

Yet Papa's rather a babe in the wood in most things as compared with you and me."

Lady de Burgh laughed.

"Do go with Mary, Maurice. I'm afraid my cousin's rather fidgeting—she travels with so much luggage."

"And always expects to be waited on," said Mary, and made a charming *moue* in response to her mother's air of reproof. "Yes, darling, it's really true, and it's not unkind, for Maurice will very soon see for himself."

"You will find me in the drawing-room when you bring back Caroline," Lady de Burgh said. "I shall have had my nap and my head will be better."

After all the young people decided to walk across the dunes to Breagh, which had a little station at a distance set down amid the bogs, with very little sign of life about it. They were standing on the high wind-swept platform when the train came in. There was a great bustle, the guard of the train calling out to Martin Gannon, who was station-master and staff at the little station, to hurry himself up there out of that or the luggage would get carried on.

Lady Damer had to be pulled out unceremoniously and deposited on the platform, while the harassed-looking Baines and Mary de Burgh, between them, recovered the parrot and the jewel-case; the travelling clock and the travelling cushion; the magazines and books, the golf-sticks, the rugs and umbrellas, the reading-lamp and all the other impedimenta with which the lady travelled. The dog was most difficult

of all. He was a large white Pomeranian of a savage disposition, affectionate to Lady Damer, but the terror of her friends. He refused to come out, so had to be taken from the carriage by main force or left to go on with the train.

Maurice solved the difficulty by dragging the dog out by his collar and planting him on the platform beside his mistress.

"That was a very dangerous thing to do," she said ungratefully. "Wolf does not like rough handling."

Maurice reddened; and somehow that reddening made Mary de Burgh feel unreasonably angry.

"I can always manage a dog, Lady Damer," he said with a rueful laugh.

"You should not be too sure, young man," the lady answered coldly. Baines had gone off to claim the luggage. "He bites everyone but me. I have to pay my servants a bonus on their wages so that they shall not complain if Wolf bites them. Poor darling, he is very nervous. As a rule he cannot endure anyone near me but himself. I don't know how many maids I've had since I got Wolf."

"You should punish him or get rid of him," Maurice said briefly.

"Punish Wolf!"

While the lady said it she relaxed her hold on the dog's collar. He sprang from her. Judy had been lying down behind Mary's skirts. The Pomeranian like a great white flash sprang on the much smaller Judy. Immediately all was confusion. The train forgot to be in a hurry. The guard swung himself

out of his van and the engine driver from his engine. Several of the passengers came out of the train the better to see the dog-fight.

Lady Damer was screaming. Everyone was giving advice and shouting one thing or another. Mary de Burgh was crying to the earth and the air to save Judy, whacking away the while with her walking-stick at Wolf who had Judy pinned to the earth, but was not too absorbed in his killing to utter a menacing growl and turn the whites of his eyes against his assailant.

Suddenly Maurice saw red. He stooped and lifted Wolf by the collar. The beast was uncommonly heavy, but his long slender hands seemed possessed of steel-like strength. He lifted the dog and dashed him with some force to a distance. Wolf rolled over and over and tumbled on to the line.

"You brute! You have killed my dog!" shrieked Lady Damer.

Judy got up, whimpering. There was blood on her fur.

"I am very sorry," Maurice said, panting a little. "I had to do it. He would have killed Judy. I don't think he is much the worse."

Wolf picked himself up and regained the platform. He was limping and some of Judy's blood was about his jaws.

Lady Damer ran to him and embraced him.

"My darling doggums," she said, "and did the hateful man try to kill him under the horrid train?"

"Take your places!" shouted the guard, waving

his green flag; the passengers scrambled back into the train and it went off, grinning and satirical faces looking back from every window at Lady Damer weeping over her injured pet.

Maurice walked back to Castle Morrogh with Judy. Mary had considered it her duty to try to placate the wrathful lady, who asserted that if things had been left to her there would have been no difficulty in controlling Wolf.

There was a certain grim amusement in Maurice's expression as he walked into Mount Lambert Post Office and asked his sister for the wherewithal to wash Judy's wound. Judy was by this time almost as much attached to Honoria as to her brother.

He washed the cut carefully and gently, Honoria holding the basin and assisting him.

"Wouldn't it be safer, Morry, to leave poor Judy here, fearing that terrible brute would get hold of her again?"

"It might be," Maurice agreed; and added that Wolf was a brute beast, and quite beyond the law, to attack a lady.

He went back to Castle Morrogh alone. Mary met him in the hall. She had dressed for dinner in an emerald green frock, which brought out the colour of her hair and eyes and her golden freckles.

Maurice looked at her with adoration.

"Lady Damer is furious, Morry," she said. "She will turn you the cold shoulder. But never mind: you were splendid. She says that you have broken Wolf's leg, and she has been insisting on a vet. It is difficult for anyone to see what is wrong: he is

such a brute. Poor Judy! What have you done with her?"

"Honoria is taking charge of her. We thought it best. The Vicomte and Sir Hugo have not yet returned?"

"No: and Mamma is trying to placate Lady Damer. Wolf, I believe, is in the dressing-room, showing his teeth at anyone who opens the door. Come—you shall have some tea."

CHAPTER VI

THE MISCHIEF-MAKER

MAURICE did not see Lady Damer till dinner-time, when, as Mary had prophesied, she turned him the cold shoulder, and a great deal of it.

The Vicomte and Sir Hugo had returned but had not as yet, coming at the last moment to dress for dinner, heard the tragic tale of Wolf and Judy.

The two gentlemen were a little puzzled obviously by the strain in the situation. The dining-table was round, and Sir Hugo had on either side of him Lady Damer and Maurice. On Lady Damer's other hand sat Mary by the Vicomte with Lady de Burgh beside him. These old friends had always plenty to say to each other. Sir Hugo did not find much to say to Lady Damer, whom he disliked as a fashionable and wholly selfish woman. He had had a long day and he was hungry. He wanted to eat his dinner in peace, if only she would allow him. He liked quiet, soft-spoken women, being accustomed to his wife and daughter. Lady Damer had a high-pitched voice which could fall to a certain flatness, hardly less displeasing.

No use expecting the Vicomte to help him out

beyond what good manners demanded. The Vicomte, however, was telling Lady de Burgh some of the happenings of the day. Sir Hugo was sometimes puzzled at his wife's absorption in the people. It was just like the English when Ireland captured them. There was no end to their infatuation. The De Burghs had lived comfortably with their people on the whole, though there had been some trouble in the Land League days and he himself had been threatened, despite all he had done for the tenants. He could remember Elizabeth's face in those days, full of an unutterable pain. She had stood by him and had never asked him to abate the smallest measure of his just demands; but he had guessed what the trouble cost her by the pale joy of her face when the settlement came and the old friends were good friends once more.

He was thinking of these things as he ate his soup, and wishing that Lady Damer's large white shoulder was not quite so near. Why could she not wear something like the flowered scarf with which Elizabeth had covered her modest *décolletée*? The mother of a big fellow in the Life Guards should not go about undressed like that. It distressed him because of Mary. He was very glad, he said to himself, savagely, that he had married a modest woman. He wondered why some men found Caroline Damer attractive.

She was talking of matters now which did not even remotely interest him. He let her talk, till the first edge was taken off his hunger. Then he said something designed to drawn Maurice into the conversation. He remembered that Caroline Damer liked boys—

not as Elizabeth liked them, or loved them, with a certain unsatisfied maternal longing for a son—but in a philandering way which the honest gentleman detested.

What was the matter with the woman? Wasn't Morry good-looking enough for her? As soon as Maurice came into the conversation Lady Damer stiffened. Describing it afterwards for his wife Sir Hugo said that she snorted, which was not to be taken literally. At least she ignored Maurice, who coloured under the pointed rudeness of her manner.

Sir Hugo fumed. What did the woman mean by it? Was not anyone she met at his table entitled at least to her outward civility? Maurice, with that deep sudden flush, was handsomer than ever. Looking up suddenly Sir Hugo intercepted a glance from his daughter's eyes directed full upon the victim of Lady Damer's rudeness. It was a glance which conveyed a world of kindness and beneficence: there was humour in it as well. Mary's eyebrows, which gave her mignonne face its last charming touch of whimsicality, lifted ever so lightly towards the shining mass of waves and curls which crowned her head. No wonder Maurice smiled back again with a slight careless shrug of his shoulders.

Sir Hugo, becoming more amiable now that he was less hungry, cast about in his mind for a subject of conversation which should interest his guest.

"Got that ill-tempered brute of a dog still?" he asked, with no intention of giving offence.

"You mean Wolf?" Lady Damer exclaimed. "Oh, but he is not really bad-tempered. He is so

sweet with those he loves. I could do anything with him. I confess I like an exclusive dog, not one who is friendly with anybody. I hate a slobbering dog."

"He'll take the nose off your face one of these days," Sir Hugo said. "Like that man who wrote novels—what was his name? Oh yes, Stevenson. We touched at his Island that time we went a cruise in the Pacific six years ago. He told us himself—an odd-looking chap, so lean and long with straight black hair. He had a dog like yours; I believe it was one of those big Poms, very uncertain brutes in the temper. He loved the dog the more because it was unfriendly to all the world except him, just like that brute of yours. The dog used to sleep on the end of his bed. One day when the poor chap was lying in bed with one of his hemorrhages the brute suddenly got up and savaged him. Luckily the bell was handy. Had a kink in his temper like that dog of yours."

Sir Hugo turned away and took red-currant jelly with his saddle of mutton. He had made a long speech. Saddle of mutton was a dish he particularly liked. He did not intend to continue the conversation till he had emptied his plate.

"Stevenson's dog may have been ill-treated," sighed Lady Damer affectedly. "If Wolf were as you say to 'savage' me I should love him all the more, for I should pity him."

"You should pity your maids," said Sir Hugo between the mouthfuls. "How many have you pensioned off since you've had Wolf?"

Lady Damer disdained to answer. Instead she mentioned the fact that she had taken the liberty of sending a groom off with a telegraphic message to the vet. at Galway to come and set Wolf's leg.

"He won't come," Sir Hugo said shortly. "It's forty miles. Did you mention that you'd pay him a specialist's fee? I wonder what horse Patsy took. I hope it wasn't Flora. She's coughing."

"I really didn't ask," Lady Damer said sweetly. She enjoyed getting even with Sir Hugo, although she generally was very amiable to men.

Sir Hugo remembered his manners so far as to ask what was the matter with Wolf's leg.

"I'm afraid it is broken." Lady Damer turned a very unbecoming red. "Don't ask me the cause, Hugo; I'd prefer not to discuss it here."

Sir Hugo ate the last morsel of the excellent mutton and put down his knife and fork to stare at Lady Damer.

"Oh, why not?" he asked, with a mystified air "But you needn't have sent Patsy six miles with your telegraph message. Maurice can set a dog's leg with anyone I know, and what's more he has a way with animals. Wolf will let him do it. I've seen him handle nearly as bad-tempered brutes before."

"I should not think of troubling Mr. . . . Roche," Lady Damer said haughtily—with an insolent intention in the pause before the name.

Later on, in the drawing-room, Sir Hugo, being fed and warmed, was sufficiently placated by Lady Damer, who could be really agreeable when she chose, to offer to drive her the next day to lunch with some

people she particularly wanted to visit. He was sleepy after the long day's driving and the air of the crowded Petty Sessions Court, so he went off early to bed without receiving any enlightenment in the matter of Wolf's broken leg.

Maurice was away next morning when Lady Damer came downstairs. He had gone up to Mount Lambert Post Office to breakfast with Honoria, finding Judy very little the worse for her encounter with Wolf. Lady Damer breakfasted in her room. She said quite frankly that in the country she was always very hungry for breakfast and liked to have it alone, without the trouble of talking to people.

She appeared only in time to take her place in the mail-phæton, which Sir Hugo drove with a pair. He was a very good whip, and he liked his driving to be admired. Lady Damer, sleek and comfortable after a long night's sleep and a large breakfast, was quite prepared to be amiable. As a rule she did not waste her attentions on a man obviously so much in love with his wife as Hugo de Burgh. But even Sir Hugo, glancing at her as she stood buttoning her gloves on the hall-door steps, gave a tribute of half-willing admiration to the perfection of her turn-out. She was severely tailor-made this morning, and from her hat to her shoes everything she wore was well thought out and became her. She had good skin and her hair was shining. Her eyes narrowed themselves as she looked up at Sir Hugo.

"By the way," she said, "there is no reply telegram from the vet. Perhaps I ought to have prepaid it. I have asked Baines to see that young

man, Mr. Roche, when he comes in and ask him to look at Wolf. The poor darling's knee joint is as big as an egg."

"I told you it was no good sending for Meade. Morry will see to the dog. He's as fond of them—ill conditioned or not—as De Luynes. It is part of their attraction for each other."

He got Lady Damer comfortably settled beside him and tucked in with the rug, and they started. He was rather glad Caroline had suggested his driving her over to the Blakes, though they were not very exciting. Caroline knew how to be a pleasant companion, and it was nice that she appreciated his skill in handling the pair, who were a little fresh this morning and took some handling. He remembered with gratitude that time he had been driving Caroline when they had met a heavy cart on a precipitous mountain road, the driver fast asleep. It had been a very close shave. He had had to take the outside, and if Hector had taken fright at the precipice below, as he might well have done, there would have been no chance for them. Lady Damer had sat perfectly rigid, and when they had passed the cart in safety she had looked up at him and said: "I knew you could do it." The memory came back to him, making him feel kindly towards the lady to whom he had been rather intolerant last night.

He looked down at her when they were out on the bog road and going at a spanking rate. He would not have trusted many people with Rory and Hector on the bog road where there was often a long stretch, quite unprotected, with a sheer fall on either

side to the bog—the bog with its dreadful power of suction. But he could trust himself; and the horses were sweet-tempered, though Hector was a trifle nervy. Besides, on the bog, you saw for a long way if anything was coming.

He could not help reminding her of the narrow squeak they had that day when they had met the cart coming down Murrisk.

"If it hadn't been for the sense of the horse that gave us the utmost possible space to pass it might have fared ill with us."

"Oh," she said lightly, "I was not afraid, though I am a wretched coward usually—not with you, Hugo."

He looked at her very kindly. He had no idea that she was saying in her own mind, "Lucky I was too paralysed to move or I'd have jumped out."

He recanted all his unkind opinions of her last night. With the beautiful autumn morning, the silken-mouthed pair going along so fast and free, the sense of enjoyment he always had when he was driving, he felt kindly to all the world, even though Blake was going to bore him and he did not like Mrs. Blake much. Blake would talk about his boys and all they were doing, and would break off as he always did with a little laugh and "By Jove, De Burgh, after all you're to be congratulated on your girl. Girls don't leave home as boys do; and if there's a war, as they say there will be, girls don't have to fight."

If he would only vary it! Sir Hugo had an unexpressed soreness about his sonless condition. When

he thought over it he said to himself that he would not have given Mary for seven sons. Yet the place had to go to Humphry de Burgh, who had married an actress, a painted woman with a wig, as Sir Hugo described her. Mary would have made such an owner for Castle Morrogh if only she had been a boy. With her feelings for the house and the place and the people! And the people's feeling for her. Why, there wasn't an old man or woman or child or cat or dog within ten miles Mary didn't know. The people came to their doors to bless her as she went by.

There! He had forgotten Lady Damer. A little apprehension of the irritation Blake was going to cause him had set his mind off wandering upon a familiar track, after a familiar grief. He became aware suddenly, as he was tooling the pair delicately between stone walls where the road had narrowed, of what she was saying.

"The young man has, of course, a veneer. It completely disappeared when he flung my poor dog in front of the train. He was in your stables, I believe, before that dear, delightful, eccentric M. de Luynes took him up."

Was she talking of Maurice? He turned and looked at her.

"Morry! Throw your dog in front of the train! Why, Morry is infatuated about animals. He'd never do it."

"My poor dog could tell another story," she said coldly. Then she added:

"But how noble of you, Hugo, to accept that young man as you do! to allow Mary to be constantly in his

company! Is it not a little cruel to him? He might have aspirations, poor creature. And people might misunderstand your goodness to him."

Sir Hugo looked at her with an air of being thunderstruck. His colour deepened.

"Morry!" he said in stupefaction. "Morry! Why, he and Mary have grown up together! They have so many tastes in common—poetry and animals and—and—Ireland. They are both mad about Ireland. Mary is not Elizabeth's daughter for nothing. I don't understand it myself, though I'm —Norman-Irish, I suppose. They're very good people but too lawless. They'll poach anything. My wife says—'Let 'em.' She actually says 'Let 'em!' There's no knowing how far the English will go when they get the Irish bee in their bonnet. Morry would never think of my girl that way. Why, he used to hold her pony when she was little. He saved her life once when a little devil of a Shetland I had got for her reared—all but went into the bog with her on his back. Morry risked his life for the child. I've never forgotten it to him."

"You are such dear, quixotic people, you and Elizabeth. I never believed in Mary's being in and out of the cabins as I saw her when I stayed here. There was no knowing what she might have picked up. Dear Elizabeth is an angel, of course. But—wouldn't it be a little embarrassing if the poor young man *were* to lift his eyes? . . . Mary is so very charming and unusual. That colour of a red Irish setter in her hair and eyes. And such a heart! Well, well—perhaps I have a grievance. My Chris-

topher begs that he may join us when he has a furlough. There is no difficulty about getting leave. . . ."

She changed the conversation adroitly. She knew her man well enough to be aware that nothing was to be gained by labouring a point. By and by Sir Hugo would consider the doubt she had implanted and take it for his own.

CHAPTER VII

MENACE

Morry had set Wolf's leg with an expert science. More, Wolf in his mistress's absence had proved quite amenable. Mary had assisted at the operation, and she as well as Baines were enthusiastic in their praises of Maurice's skill with the dog and the marvellous way in which Wolf had submitted to his handling.

Wolf's mistress, so far from being mollified or grateful, was distinctly displeased, the more so that Sir Hugo, who had recovered from her blandishments and rather wondered why he had yielded, remarked that the dog would be all right if she did not spoil him. "An over-fed brute" was a description most resented by Wolf's mistress.

But as the days passed the seed of mischief implanted by Lady Damer worked in Sir Hugo's mind. There began to be something unfriendly in the air, of which little by little Maurice became aware. Sir Hugo was not a person who had any finesse. Not many hours passed before he had snapped at his wife about the too great friendship between his daughter and Maurice Roche.

"All very fine to say he has good blood," he grumbled. "Why, his father shod my horses and he himself held them."

"What does it matter?" Elizabeth de Burgh asked patiently. "You can go nowhere in England without meeting people who have made their money in extraordinary ways. Nothing like so clean and wholesome as shoeing horses or holding them."

"Thank God we don't live in England," Sir Hugo growled, with an unwonted irritability towards his wife.

"For the matter of that Francis Thompson held horses in the Strand," she went on, pursuing her own thoughts.

"Who's he?" inquired Sir Hugo.

"What matter!" she said with a faint laugh. "You would not be interested. But—I cannot imagine what has come over you about Maurice, unless it is Caroline."

"Why should it be Caroline? Can I not see for myself?"

"Christopher is coming to fish at Leenane," she said, ignoring the question. "I think Caroline wants him to be asked here."

"Why not?"

"I do not care for Christopher. He is too much of a worldling. We are antipathetic."

"I don't know what that means. Most women are fascinated by him. I don't like him so very much myself. He's been spoilt by women. Still, he's decent to his mother. And . . ." He glanced

at his wife. Then he remarked with apparent irrelevance: "Mary won't have much to live on, nor you either, when I'm gone."

"I should not want much if you were gone. But why do you talk like that? Mary would never think of Christopher."

Elizabeth de Burgh spoke with some heat.

"Why not?" her husband asked again.

"Why not?" She laughed her faint laugh, which Sir Hugo had said in his courting days had a sound like fairy bells—but it was not a laugh of merriment. She could not have answered her own question. She had resented unreasonably Christopher's manner to Mary a year ago. Unreasonably, because there was so little to resent. Christopher, six foot two and very goodly, with a richer colour than usually falls to Englishmen, and very fine blue eyes which could be sleepy and alert by turns, had had a way of opening his eyes, with admiration in them, on Mary. He had fetched and carried for Mary; had gone to see her humble friends with her—spoiling her visits, Mary said ungratefully—had played lawn-tennis, and ridden, and driven with her; had turned the pages of her music of evenings when she sang what he called "rebelly" songs, the old sweet crooning songs her mother loved. Lady de Burgh could not formulate her resentment against Sir Christopher Damer, beyond saying that he "stared" at Mary and made her feel uncomfortable. And Bawn O'Connon, Mary's foster sister, who lived with her mother at the gate lodge, had blushed deeply one day when Lady de Burgh, accompanied by Christopher, called at the

lodge in passing. Christopher had that way with girls that he made them blush.

Afterwards Lady de Burgh had said to Bawn—

"I hope you did not mind my bringing in Sir Christopher, Bawn. You looked very nice in your big apron, making the bread"—for she thought the girl was embarrassed by the sight of the strange gentleman when her arms were all over flour and some of the same had got on to her delicately pretty cheeks.

"Oh, indeed, my Lady," said Bawn, "it wasn't that I minded the apron. But it was the gentleman, my Lady. He had some way with him that made me feel that shy that I'd run into a mousehole from him."

There are certain intuitions and safeguards that come to the innocent, impossible to explain to those who do not feel them. As well ask them to see the shadowy wings of the angels who whisper to the ear of the pure spirit to beware.

She could not have made Hugo understand the vague yet distinct feeling that she had about Christopher, which made the conjunction of his name with Mary's intolerable.

"Upon my word," said Sir Hugo, speaking more truthfully than he knew, "I often think I don't know the woman I married yet, Elizabeth."

The Vicomte had begun to show his age. He was frailer in these days. Elizabeth de Burgh had said to her daughter one day that the Vicomte began to grow transparent. He did not seem to notice that anything had troubled the cordial relations which

had existed between the family and its guests: or, if he noticed, he ascribed it to Lady Damer's presence.

"Ah, my friend," he said to Lady de Burgh one day, when he met her coming out of the tiny oratory which only she and Mary used, "you make a refuge for yourself against the world. But what has the world to do with Castle Morrogh? It is so delicate, the atmosphere of this dear house. The world spoils it."

It was very rheumatic weather, wet and warm—and the clouds hung low on the earth. The Vicomte was very anxious to move on to Kilcrea, where Canon O'Flanagan and Lord Corrib and his daughters, Brigid and Cushla FitzWalter, eagerly awaited his coming, but the move had to be postponed for a few days, till he was better able to travel. There was a certain spring in the grounds at Kilcrea which had qualities sovereign against the rheumatism. He was always better after a visit there, even though the Canon's house was built just above the Falls of the Shannon: a damp situation many people would have thought it. He talked so much about moving on that Lady de Burgh's eyes reproached him. She did not speak because she knew that he had not missed the coldness in Sir Hugo's manner to Maurice.

Meanwhile, the world was more and more in evidence at Castle Morrogh, without indeed affecting the inhabitants. Lady Damer, with her careful dressing, her "transformations," her powder, her blackened eye-lashes, her scents and the whole manner of artificiality which clung about her, subtly, to the Vicomte's mind, poisoned the place. Lady de

Burgh's look when her cousin poured the details of the latest Society scandal into her ears was a study in painful endurance. Caroline Damer's conversation was indeed hardly to be described as *virginibus puerisque*; and there were moments when the Vicomte, sitting with a courteous bent head, apparently contemplating with melancholy interest his twisted and discoloured hands, felt like gathering up Mary, disabled as he was, and sweeping her off into another room out of reach of the pollution of such talk. Not that it was really so very dreadful. He acknowledged to himself that he had heard much worse in some very exclusive drawing-rooms. It was only that such conversation was as much out of place at Castle Morrogh as it would have been in a convent of nuns.

He and Elizabeth joined in frustrating, in distracting Lady Damer. There were moments indeed when the lady would take a thought and say: "Dear me, I ought not to talk of such things with that child present. What great eyes she has! If I were you, Elizabeth, my dear, I would keep her a perpetual *jeune fille*. Let me see—what age is she? Nineteen. She won't look a day older when she's twenty-nine. We must not talk of naughty people before our *ingénue*."

It was when she made such speeches that the Vicomte resented Lady Damer most of all.

One of these evenings the Don, who sounded oddly as Mr. Fitzmaurice, came to dinner. Maurice Roche was not present. He had gone up the hill to stay the night at the post-office, where there was a little

bedroom in the thatch which had been his in boyhood. He had been spending a good deal of his time with his sister of late, explaining to Lady de Burgh, who always understood, that once he and the Vicomte had moved on it would be a long time before he should see Honoria again.

Maurice's absence seemed to remove a certain awkwardness from the dinner-table, where Sir Hugo had been somewhat morose of late, and his wife's eyes had watched him with a maternal solicitude in their gaze. Was there anything troubling Hugo beyond the annoyance implanted by Caroline Damer? He did not look well. Perhaps it was a delusion caused by the shaded lamp light, that he looked baggy under the eyes and had shadows about his face. Or had these things been coming gradually, and did the shaded lamplight but exaggerate them?

To-night Sir Hugo was very amiable, obviously interested in his guest. It seemed a pity, Elizabeth thought, that so much of the conversation ran on money, great fortunes and how they were made, gold rushes, wonderful gambling *coups*, how some man had been a pauper and in a day had been raised to riches beyond the dreams of avarice.

She rather wondered how the talk had come about. Money was not often the topic of conversation at Castle Morrogh, although the want of it had sometimes cramped the things they had done—would do. She supposed the trend of the conversation was due to Lady Damer, who openly confessed that she liked her flutter on the Stock Exchange, and expressed her acknowledgments to her son who had once

or twice come to her rescue when she had been plunging.

"Not that Christopher liked it," she had added. She was strangely and wonderfully frank at times. "Christopher has enough of the Damer in him not to play the fool with money. I don't know anyone really who gets the value of his money better than Christopher."

Lady Damer had married Damer of the Soaps, whose real name was not Damer but Hopkins. He had been married before to the daughter of an impoverished good family; and in marrying her had taken the name and the succession to a little old grey manor-house on the Yorkshire fells, much too small and ancient to be lived in, but very valuable to the man whose father had been a mill-hand, because he could refer to it as "our old place in Yorkshire." He had not been so generous as she had hoped to his second wife, and had left all to his heir, with the exception of a very modest jointure for the widow. Therefore Lady Damer's remarks about her late husband had often distressed and shocked Elizabeth de Burgh.

Of course it was Caroline's way. Elizabeth looked up and met the eyes of the Don, sombre, beautiful eyes, which rested on her for a second and passed on to Mary. He used the queer jargon of the American financial world while replying to Caroline Damer, who was consulting him as to a transference of securities. The odd words fell from his lips with as strange an effect as if he had been Cervantes. Hugo, though he said very little, was obviously interested in the

tale of gold. Well, Walter Raleigh had looked somewhat like Mr. Antonio Herrera Fitzmaurice, yet he had sought Eldorado and found it.

Poor man, no wonder he looked sad! Elizabeth de Burgh knew the tragedy of his life from Honoria. His young wife and her two beautiful babies, sitting in the verandah of their house one summer day, had been engulfed by an earthquake. The earth had rocked and roared, and where the house had been was nothing but a few ruins. A horror. Many a man might have gone mad. The tragedy was in Don Antonio's eyes—it came naturally to one to call him Don rather than Mr.—and brooded there even while he smiled his slow smile, and told of the fortunes which had come to men who had had the courage to stake all on a single throw of the dice.

They left Don Antonio and Sir Hugo in the dining-room, where they stayed long enough to fidget Lady Damer, who was not happy in the society of her own sex.

"Do play the piano, child," she said to Mary, who had a long strip of embroidery in her hand destined to make an altar frontal for the little chapel at the Cross. "Put down that thing which is spoiling your eyes. I am quite sure Mr. Fitzmaurice will follow your melancholy music like the rats the fiddler—or was it a fiddler?—in the poem."

Mary obediently got up and put away her strip, remarking as she did so that she could not understand how the Don had made money, since he had the eyes of a lost child.

Under cover of the music Lady Damer talked, hardly troubling to lower her voice.

"Such an odd person!" she said. "Do you know that he actually referred to that handsome post-mistress of yours as his cousin? I suppose the creature is not setting her cap at him? It would be such a pity, with all his money. She would not know how to spend it. And he actually talks of buying a place here."

"Honoria would be afraid of his memories," Lady de Burgh said, as though she talked to herself.

"Oh, you mean the buried family. I've heard all about that. Very sad for the poor things! Hugo tells me that he has made the most beautiful garden there and set up a shrine of the Virgin. Very pretty! But it is years ago. He was only a boy. Now he must be thirty-six. There are grey hairs in his head. He cannot be fretting for them still. Men are not made like that."

She smiled a queer smile which Elizabeth de Burgh found intolerable.

"Honoria told me that they were very beautiful—the little mother and the two lovely babies. He carries their pictures with him always."

"Ah, it is dangerous," Lady Damer said, with a giggle, "when men talk of their sorrows. It would be a good thing if someone were to save him from—the post-mistress. It would be a most unsuitable match."

Elizabeth de Burgh said nothing. Nothing that she could say was likely to be understood by Lady Damer. Mary was playing an old tune full of lone-

liness and melancholy. The musician who had rediscovered it said that it came to him out of a cloud as he crossed the Pass of Birds. She played and she sang, but with the songs she loved best she preferred no music. She would sit with her little ivory-coloured face supported on her hand, her eyes brooding, while she sang the mournful and passionate songs in which the heart of desolation seemed to speak.

CHAPTER VIII

FUTURES

The evening before the Vicomte and Maurice were to move on Sir Christopher Damer arrived unexpectedly.

Maurice came in at the tea-hour to find a tall, good-looking soldierly person straddling the hearth-rug. Sir Christopher was apologising to his hostess for having come as an uninvited guest.

"You see Mamma and I cannot endure being parted," he said, with a mockery which made Lady de Burgh look up with wondering and rather troubled eyes. "And so as I found myself at Leenane and the fishing had come to an end I thought I would just drop in for a day or two."

Maurice was introduced. Sir Christopher's eyes passed over him to rest with a bold admiration on Mary, who had just come into the hall, brilliant in her emerald-green frock, in her dress a few murrey-coloured chrysanthemums matching oddly her eyes and hair. It was raining. Her hair under her green hood was sprinkled with rain and the drops hung on her eyelashes.

She looked up at Sir Christopher Damer with a sudden shyness which made her lower her eyes again.

Maurice watching her felt a rage and despair in his heart. He was going away to-morrow, leaving this . . . brute—Maurice was not often violent—to look at Mary in that cool smiling way which made her eyes droop before it.

"Mary child, you are wet: run and change!" her mother said.

Mary gave herself a little shake like a dog, and the rain-drops hissed in the fire of turf and wood which was burning on the hearth.

"It had only just begun to rain," she said. "Maurice and I ran all the way home from the lodge. Bawn would have given me an umbrella, but I hate umbrellas. It would take very heavy rain to come through this stuff."

She sat down behind the tea-cups and proceeded to make the tea. Sir Christopher watched her with the eye of a connoisseur. It pleased him that he could always make Mary look down, the more that she was so frankly unconscious with other people. He watched her little brown hands as they ladled the tea from an old silver caddy into the tea-pot and proceeded to pour the water. He anticipated her in this office, telling her that she would burn her fingers. He poured the water from a height, reminding his hostess how she had liked his tea-making on a former occasion, though she had accused him of making tea like a madman. Lady de Burgh smiled. Though she vaguely disapproved of Christopher, he was oddly attractive when he wished: and just now he was very willing to be friends.

Maurice, standing a little outside the group, felt

the sickness of jealousy in his heart. So they would be to-morrow when he was gone. Ungratefully he did not think of consolation because the Ladies Brigid and Cushla FitzWalter would be frankly and simply kind. They were wholesome fresh-looking girls, without beauty, but pleasant enough with their honest eyes and open-air atmosphere to put froward and exacting beauty out-of-court. He would be otter-hunting and duck-shooting and beagling and cubbing with the Ladies FitzWalter, and it would not occur to them or their father that there was anything remarkable in his position towards them. For the matter of that he knew all about the young ladies' love-affairs. They had a frank way of talking about their swains, calling them by their surnames. Consciousness had never crept into his relations with that happy household.

After dinner Mary played the harp, looking like Ireland herself in her green dress veiled with Irish lace and a green wreath in her hair. Mary generally wore the green; and when people laughed about it her mother would say that it was so much more economical to wear one than many colours. She sat on a slightly raised platform at one end of the double drawing-room on which stood the grand piano as well as the harp. Mary, like her mother, was an accomplished musician, playing many instruments, and singing very sweetly as well. She never looked to better advantage than when she played the harp, her white arms gleaming from the folds of her hanging silk sleeves, her hands caressing the strings and drawing out the fairy music.

The little audience had withdrawn to the end of the room the better to hear the music. Sir Christopher had seated himself behind Lady de Burgh. Even with her his attitude had an air of intimacy which enraged poor Maurice, to whom the mother was as dear and sacred as the daughter—with a difference.

Maurice was sitting beside Lady de Burgh. She had called him to her side with a peculiar kindness, more marked and exquisite in these latter days when, for some reason, Sir Hugo, who had always been kind and gruff with him, had suddenly assumed an air of offence. On the other side of Lady de Burgh sat Lady Damer, full of superficial talk about musical matters.

The Vicomte had retired early because of the journey to-morrow : and Sir Hugo had been called away to attend to some business or other. Judy had followed the Vicomte to his room, where she still slept on his bed-foot. Wolf, much more amenable in these days, lay stretched on the rug before the drawing-room fire, looking very handsome.

Sir Christopher murmured at Lady de Burgh's ear. Drawing a little sideways, with a stiff resentment, Maurice could see the curls at the nape of the lady's neck, so like Mary's, move with Christopher's breath. He murmured something about Mary—how sweet she was, how unlike the girls one met at balls and parties.

"She is quite unique," he said ; and for once he was obviously sincere. "'Flora and the country green.' Did not someone say that ? She is as fresh

as this dear green country that you and she love so much."

Lady de Burgh looked at him kindly over her shoulder.

"You used to call Mary a rebel, Christopher," she said. "Do you remember?"

"Her wearin' of the green becomes her," he answered. "She is charming."

Maurice escaped a little later to sit awhile with the Vicomte and to read to him if he was wakeful. He was very glad to escape, but coming back for a book which the Vicomte had been reading and wished to continue, he caught a phrase or two he could not help applying to himself.

"What is he exactly to the old man?" Sir Christopher Damer asked. "Secretary, personal attendant, what?"

Maurice found the book he had come to fetch. It lay on a table just within the room, partly concealed by the big screen of Moorish work which stood by the door.

"Oh no," said Lady de Burgh—and there was a shocked sound in her voice. "He is more like a son to the Vicomte."

Maurice went away. He felt a passionate gratitude to Lady de Burgh for that sound in her voice. If he had eavesdropped further, he might have heard Mary's indignant speech.

"Does Maurice look like a personal attendant, Christopher?"

Returning to the Vicomte he found the old man in the mood to talk. The fire was burning pleasantly

on the hearth. The reading lamp threw only a dim light beyond its green shade. Judy, lying on the silk eider-down, opened a friendly eye on Maurice and wagged her tail.

"Lift me up, dear boy, and give me another pillow," said the Vicomte. "You can put by that book for to-night. I want to talk. Do you particularly wish to return to the drawing-room?"

"Indeed no. Not when you want me, Vicomte."

The obvious earnestness of the speech made the old man smile. Maurice slipped an arm under the Vicomte's shoulder and lifted him, propping him up with pillows. As he did so he felt a thinness of the shoulder-blades that hurt his heart.

Having settled him with tender care he sat down by the bed. The Vicomte's conversation was always worth listening to. He talked beautifully as a delicate and acute observer of men and things. His light hazel eyes would be the last thing about him to grow old. When he talked they were extremely animated, fluttering like moths in twilight, roaming about while he talked as though he searched out the intricacies of the human heart. But to-night he was not going to talk of abstract persons and things.

"You are very good to me, Maurice," he began. "Dubois, though he is a clever fellow and a trained nurse, does not handle me nearly so deftly as you do. How do you account for that?"

"I suppose," said Maurice with a little flush, "it is because I am so fond of you, Vicomte."

The Vicomte laid one of his long fine hands—a mere bundle of skin and bone and nerves now—on

Maurice's. There was very seldom any demonstration of feeling between these two men who loved each other dearly.

"Ah, yes," he said dreamily. "It has been a good time since we met. I don't know that you have ever disappointed me, Morry. There never was a time when you seemed to prefer other society to mine. If I have been exacting you have never let me feel it. 'Crabbed age and youth cannot live together'—that was what your Shakespeare said. But you and I have done very well together, Morry."

"There is nothing crabbed about you," Maurice said in eager protest. "You never could be old—in his sense. Many people must have envied me being your companion. I have not deserved it, sir, but I am grateful. I am only unhappy because I am such an undeserving fellow."

"Dear Maurice!" said the Vicomte, with a lingering tenderness. "You don't know how much you have given me."

"It is you who have given me everything. Where should I be only for you?"

"You like the prospect of the three years at Oxford?"

"Except that they separate me from you. This last year of wandering together has been good."

"Yes, I wouldn't give that up, though it was selfish, perhaps. It has been very good. And we have learnt to know each other even better than before and to love each other better. It has been a good time since you and I and Judy joined company. No—you need not look alarmed, Maurice. The

good comradeship is not over yet. But life is uncertain. I have secured you against the chances for the next three years. After that—do you still think you would like a business career, Morry ? "

" Yes—as things are. I almost wish you had not insisted on Oxford, Vicomte. You have given me too much. I should like to be earning for myself."

" So soon, Maurice ? "

The Vicomte's thin eyebrows went up whimsically.

" You see, sir, a man when he comes to my age should be independent."

" Let me see—how old are you ? "

" Twenty-one."

" It is a great age." The hazel eyes rallied the boy lovingly.

" You have your Scholarship," he went on, more seriously. " It was very good of them to let you drop a year. Your Scholarship will make you to a great extent independent. And there are plenty of prizes to be won. You have the makings of a very good scholar, I believe. You might easily take a First. You might win a Fellowship. But you think you'd prefer business."

" There are many things I should like better than business," Maurice said slowly. " Law, diplomacy, politics, soldiering. They are not for me. I have no money."

" And you think business may be the shortest cut to—something, *n'est-ce pas* ? "

Maurice flushed.

" I must not go on living on you, sir," he said.

" Why, the obligation would be on my side—only

—it is something I have wanted to tell you, Maurice. I cannot now do as much for you as I once hoped. I have found . . . another use for the money I believed at my disposal."

"Let me drop Oxford, sir, and find something to do."

"No, no; you are not to think of that. I have plenty to live upon, even if the money that has passed out of my hands should not return. I do not think it will return. I only tell you, because—I should have nothing to leave you, *mon enfant*," impossible to convey the tenderness of the phrase, "or very little, if I were to go out suddenly, as I might. Let us talk of the business now—with this understanding that your three years at the University are secured. I do not insist on Oxford, but I should like you to take your degree. After those three years there will be—the business. Would you like banking? I have influence up and down Europe. Or—there is ship-building. Lord Esk would do anything for me. The wine-trade . . . I could get my friend Castelneuf—you know La Veuve Castelneuf?"

Maurice laughed.

"My grandfather was in the wine-trade," he said. "It sounds a very decent sort of business. I would rather handle grapes than coins."

Downstairs Lady Damer was remarking in a voice which could be heard all down the long drawing-room that the Vicomte had got his marching-orders.

Sir Hugo, who had come in just in time to hear her, spoke with a sharpness he did not often display in his manner with a woman.

"How lightly you say it, Caroline! The finest of fine gentlemen, the truest of friends, the most unselfish, the most kind and courteous. . . ."

> "Queens have died young and fair,
> Dust has closed Helen's eye.

I read that somewhere the other day," said Lady Damer indifferently.

"I suppose that elegant boy will have to work for his living," she said in a different tone to Lady de Burgh. "I do not like him. I look on it that he has been taken out of his place. But I acknowledge that he is dangerously good-looking. Have you noticed him and Christopher together? It is amusing!"

CHAPTER IX

SOMETHING MORE THAN KIN

Mr. Antonio Herrera Fitzmaurice had come and gone at intervals during that month of September. He had pushed on the work at the old Castle of the Fitzmaurices, managing to convey something of his own energy to the workmen, shaking them out of their position that there was no such great hurry about the work at all, that what had stood for three hundred years might very well stay for another hundred days or so.

Mr. Fitzmaurice—since the whole place had taken to calling him the Don, we may as well drop the drab English prefix which so little suited him and call him the Don also—was always turning up at unexpected moments. It made the workmen feel that they might as well get on with the work and be quit of these sudden alarms when he was seen coming over the dune, his soft hat under his arm, the wind ruffling his crisp dark hair, looking like a ghost of one of the old Fitzmaurices rather than a gentleman of to-day.

As the autumn went on and the days grew colder there was often a wind across the dunes blowing in from the sea that was enough, as the workmen said,

to blow you out of your stannin' : but the Don did not seem to mind. He would stand out in the wind for hours at a time, gravely looking on at what the men were doing, now and again lending a hand. The Irish workmen did not think their employer so mad as English workmen in like circumstances, but they certainly thought him " a great ould bother " and " terrible onaisy in himself like," and asked each other despairingly if it wouldn't be all the same in a hundred years, and why people couldn't be let to go about their work their own way.

By the time the restoration was all but completed it was late October. Down in the valley the leaves, whirled from the trees, lay in masses of brown and orange, yellow and scarlet, fast losing their colour in the heavy rain which came at intervals with the rough wind. " The wind won't drop till there's a good fall of rain," said Patsy Kelly, the mason, who was finishing the renovated arches of doors and windows. " The world knows that the like of this wind will never die down till the rain brings it down : an' yet as long as the wind's the hoight it is ye needn't be lookin' for rain ! "

The Don found nothing contradictory in Patsy's way of imparting his weather-lore. He always listened to everything that was said with a grave courtesy.

He had put up at the De Burgh Arms in Castle Lambert instead of accepting Sir Hugo's invitation to make Castle Morrogh his headquarters. Lady Damer was still at Castle Morrogh, and her son might be met with any day, walking over the bog or the

mountain-side with a gun and a dog, bringing down a few snipe and woodcock, and now and again a plover. Presently when the weather hardened they were going to have some wild-duck shooting. Meanwhile it was wonderful how Sir Christopher managed to content himself, seeing that his coverts were waiting to be shot in Leicestershire, and that he had a dozen invitations to shoot other men's pheasants.

Sometimes Mary went out with him over the bog, of which she knew every square inch for miles, according to her father. Under her guidance Sir Christopher avoided the soft places, very nasty some of them, and not easy to get out of if one got in when one was alone. There had been a couple of children lost in the bog not so many years ago, sinking till only a piteous hand stretched above the black quaking peat guided the unhappy father to their living grave.

That was not *their* bog, Mary explained with a little shudder when someone had told the tale. It was Caltra bog, more than five miles away, in the next parish. Morrogh bog never did worse than bog you to the knees if you did not know the places to avoid. Of course you *might* be drowned in the black water where the turf bank had been cut away when the water was deep after heavy rains ; but there was no record of anyone having been drowned.

" There is no harm at all in our bog," said Mary, gathering the bog cotton from a rushy pool in the midst of the bog—a slender thing in the brilliant green she loved, her russet-coloured hair blown loose by the wind and curling in soft masses about her

face. For, of course, she could not refuse to save Sir Christopher from the possibility of tumbling into bog-holes when her father suggested it, and Christopher pleaded :

" Do be merciful, Mary. You would not like to have my death laid at your door."

Mary had shown no dislike for Christopher's society. Elizabeth de Burgh was rather puzzled about that. First her husband and then Mary. She could remember a time when Hugo had not liked Christopher, an Eton boy with a blasé air—a cub, Sir Hugo had called him, wondering how it was the other boys did not kick it out of him. Now he seemed to like Christopher the man, though he had not liked him last year. He extolled his sportsman-like qualities. It was quite true that Christopher was a good sportsman, a good shot, a cricket Blue, and he had held the University boxing championship for a year. With all these achievements he was simple enough in everyday life, and did not disdain a game of croquet or lawn-tennis or even clock-golf with the somewhat elderly young ladies at the Vicarage.

Elizabeth de Burgh wondered. She had always borne with Lady Damer's visits as something which jarred and fretted her. The lady's outspoken worldliness, her low view of things, her cheerful cynicism, her assumption that everyone else must needs be selfish and callous, though for one reason or another they cloaked it, was a burden of the spirit to Elizabeth. " Of course we all know that dear Elizabeth is a saint," Lady Damer would say with mockery in her eye. When she talked now of things that

ought not to be talked of before Mary—if indeed they ought ever to be talked of—Mary took fright and went out of the room on some pretext or other, before Lady Damer got very far on delicate ground. The child had not been accustomed to a need for flight, the mother said to herself with indignation.

Certainly Christopher had muzzled his mother once or twice, and Lady de Burgh was well able to forgive the sharpness of his intervention. But that had hardly won for the son any more regard from Mary's mother. Elizabeth de Burgh was too tenacious of likings and dislikings. She heartily wished the visitors to be gone.

Several things had combined to disturb her that autumn. Maurice, of whom she was fond, had gone away under a cloud of Sir Hugo's displeasure. There had been something, a finality perhaps, about the Vicomte when he said good-bye to her that had made her heart sink. He was not well—he was failing fast, as Lady Damer had remarked indifferently—and they were dear old friends. He had filled an important place in her life. Dearly as she loved Hugo there was a part in her heart which he did not fill: or perhaps it was not her heart: perhaps it was her spirit, her intellect. Sir Hugo had never thought of his wife's spiritual or intellectual nature. He was quite satisfied that there was nothing he could have failed to give her.

Lady de Burgh was going up to Mount Lambert Post Office, where she had been always a frequent visitor; this autumn, with Lady Damer on her hands,

her visits had been less frequent. Somehow she did not care to see Caroline's curious and mocking eyes fixed on Honoria, on Honoria's precious possessions—the portrait of Sir James Fitzmaurice dim with age, just a flash of golds and olives from his cheeks and eyes, of green and silver from his cloak and his doublet in the darkness where it hung above the old piano. The high back of the piano was filled in with sun-rayed, faded rose silk. Honoria's father and mother, he with ruffles to his shirt, cut-away coat, knee breeches, and a fob hung with many seals against his flowered waistcoat—she, wearing an immense lace cap and lappets over her black silk dress. Caroline was quite capable of giggling at the old-fashioned portraits. The trifles of Waterford glass, of Rockingham dogs, of Spode and Chelsea cups, of old silver would attract Caroline's cupidity. She would estimate Honoria's embroidery, into which Honoria had put so many things, by its possible value per yard. "Too much work," she had said, of an exquisite altar-cloth which Honoria had made for the little church. "In these days of machinery no one will pay for it."

That was always Caroline's way. Lady de Burgh breathed a sigh of relief for Caroline's departure as she went up the hill, straight and tall in her black tailor-made gown, her long veil floating from her wide hat. It was good that Caroline's visit was over for this year. For some reason or other Lady Damer made an annual pilgrimage to the West of Ireland to visit her cousins, before going to Scotland.

A pity she had gone off without Christopher, who had stayed on, urged thereto by Sir Hugo. Mary had not seemed to dislike his staying. Lady de Burgh was perplexed. There was a visit Mary ought to pay to a school friend who lived near Dublin. She ought to have gone to Rosamund before now, but Christopher stayed on, apparently well pleased with his rough shooting and the society of his cousins. Talking of the duck-shooting, too. Sir Hugo seldom shot duck before the beginning of November. How long was Christopher going to stay? She could not help asking herself the inhospitable question.

The Don overtook her on the steep upward climb through the beech woods. He put on his soft hat to remove it again with a sweeping courtesy.

Lady de Burgh's expression changed as she turned to him. She liked the Don. He was very unworldly. It had been pretty to see him and the Vicomte together, outdoing each other in courtesy. The Vicomte had taken a great fancy to the Don. There was a natural brotherhood between them.

"You will come to see my improvements?" said the Don. He was very proud of his "improvements" as he called them. "They are all complete. I am free now to return to Monterey."

"Oh, you are going back there!" said Lady de Burgh, and was conscious of a feeling of dismay.

"Why—of course. My property is there: my vineyards."

"I half hoped you would settle down among us. You seem so fond of the country. She needs all her children, and all they can do for her."

"That is very true. Perhaps I may come back. I have no roots anywhere—unless it was to be here." A profound sadness fell upon his face. "I have had great trouble in my time. My life was over when it should have been just beginning. I have been happier here than I shall ever be again in my own place. I came back with but little hope of finding any of my kin. I have always wished to return to see if I could come upon traces of my family. I have found the old tower and my cousins. I shall come again—perhaps."

"Honoria is a dear creature," said Lady de Burgh gently. "She is a delightful cousin to have found."

"She is very beautiful," he said, gazing at her with an air of grave pleasure. "I am very glad to have found her among such friends. And Maurice too. You and Miss Mary and M. de Luynes are such friends as I would choose for my cousins."

Elizabeth de Burgh was stirred in her inner quiet fount of humour, a humane and gentle humour, never touched by things unworthy. The Don spoke as though he conferred a favour. She and Mary, and the Vicomte, with his centuries of glorious ancestry behind him—there had been a Godefroi de Luynes at the Siege of Acre—were at least as much honoured as honouring in that friendship which the Don took for granted.

Well, well—the Fitzmaurice Roches were a great old family too, as good as any! What if Honoria spoke with a country accent despite the Spanish adventure and had assimilated to some extent the

ways of the people among whom she lived! She was a glorious creature; and a lady, in all essentials.

They had topped the crest now and were out on the dunes. Ahead of them lay Honoria's post-office. Johanna and Josephine were quietly grazing and left off to indulge in a frolicsome caper at their approach.

The village child who helped Honoria with her household occupations, and occasionally discharged the simple duties of the post-office when neither Honoria nor the postman was there, informed them that Miss Roche was gone over to the old Castle.

They turned that way. It had been a dry season, and on the sparse grass of the dune little snail shells, hung a-row, crackled under their feet. The afternoon was very quiet. There was a sky of pale yellow dotted over with a few lumpish-looking clouds.

"There is wind coming," Lady de Burgh said, indicating these portents. "It is very wild up here in a storm. I often tell Honoria that some wild night she and the goats and the post-office will be carried out to sea."

She had spoken jestingly, but the Don said quickly:

"That is not possible. You do not mean it. . . ."

"It was a stupid jest," she said. "The post-office is tethered very firmly and the goats are in their little shed at night. I do not know exactly why they put the post-office up here. It is a solitary place, although the village is only just below that

dip. Do you see the beautiful blue smoke arising? Honoria likes her solitude. She would not care to leave it now."

"She is too young and beautiful for a place so lonely," said the Don.

Lady de Burgh smiled quietly. Honoria was thirty-four. Her beauty was a mature beauty. Did this simple lover not see it?

The tower stood up upon the yellow sky, black against the colour which showed daffodil in all the window spaces, through the arrow-slits, under the arch of the lower story. As they approached Lady de Burgh exclaimed at what the Don had been doing. There was a strong iron railing around the tower. When you had entered the enclosure and approached the tower itself you saw that the lower story had been closed on its four sides by gates of fine ironwork. Flower-beds had been made under the tower, and hardy shrubs were planted inside the iron paling, which should form in time a protecting screen against the weather.

Suddenly they caught sight of Honoria, silhouetted sharply against the light in the ruined upper story. All the sky behind the window space by which she was standing was aflame, full of a pulsing glory, it seemed.

"She is not safe," said the Don, with a catch of his breath.

"She has come here many a time," Lady de Burgh answered reassuringly, "and you have made it so much safer. Honoria would do nothing rash."

She called "Honoria! Honoria!" shading her

eyes with her hands because the light seemed to overflow all about the tower.

Honoria heard and turned round. In a minute she was beside them on the solid earth. She had the quick movements of a young girl.

CHAPTER X

THE STRUGGLE

THERE was a subtle change in Honoria to Lady de Burgh's eyes. As they walked back to the post-office where she had invited them to tea they turned now and again to look at the old tower, against the strange golden sky with its ominous lumps of floating black cloud. Perhaps it was the light on her face which gave Honoria that strange air of joy. The Don was right—Honoria was a beautiful woman, not less beautiful because of the flowing lines of maturity.

"I am glad she is not going to be wasted," Lady de Burgh said to herself. "She was made to have her arms full of children."

In the little room at the post-office, when Honoria had lit the lamp, and spread a wonderfully embroidered tea-cloth, and got out her harlequin china and set the kettle to boil, Lady de Burgh was not so sure. The cheap lamp smoked a little. It cast unbecoming shadows. Honoria looked her age.

"I return to Monterey," said the Don as they went home by the road, since the evening had set in and it would be dark in the wood, "but I shall come back. I have not given up my hope of winning

my cousin. It is now the dearest desire of my life."

Perhaps it was the darkness that emboldened him to make this confidence, which Lady de Burgh heard with a soft gasp. They walked on a carpet of dead leaves that crackled under their feet. Now and again the wind lifted the leaves and they scurried down the road, making a ghostly pattering. There was a bare hillside they passed by which had been an ancient graveyard, so old that hardly a trace of it was left except the ancient stone coffin which had been used as a drinking-trough for the cattle. But the hillside within the lone stone wall was still a burying-place. There, from time immemorial, the still-born children of the countryside had been laid under those tiny mounds no bigger than so many molehills.

No one came to this sad little burying-place except the mothers of the hapless unchristened children.

> Sometimes a woman comes across the grass
> Bare-footed, with pit-patterings scarcely heard,
> Sometimes the grazing cattle slowly pass,
> Or o'er the place sings loud some mating bird.
>
> Little feet too young and soft to walk,
> Little lips too young and pure to talk.
> Little faded grass-tufts, stalk on stalk—

That scurrying of the leaves was as though the dead children had escaped for a while and were running back to their small cold beds ere the night fell.

With the thought a sudden anguished compre-

hension came to Elizabeth de Burgh of the immense tragedy of this man's fate.

She turned to him and there was a broken sound in her voice as she spoke.

"I should be so glad if Honoria made you happy," she said. "God knows, some happiness is your due. She is, as you say, a splendid creature."

"She is a queen, a goddess, I have told her of Pilar—and Juan and the darling Pepita. They were as gay as humming-birds that last day. I had but just left them, my young wife, dear as an angel of heaven, and our lovely babes. The whole earth rocked. I was flung on my face. When I got up—the horse I had been about to mount had struck me just here" —his hand went to his head—"and galloped away —the air was still roaring and full of dust and smoke, and flame somewhere beyond it. What was left of the house had taken fire. The rest was ruins. The earth had buried them. I keep nothing of them at all—nothing but their memories."

"It was terrible," Lady de Burgh said, with tears in her voice.

He took her hand and pressed it.

"They are with the Mother of God. The little ones play about her feet."

The leaves rose again in a little whirl and pattered eerily down the hilly road.

"Honoria knows?" she asked, almost in a whisper.

"I have not yet spoken, Madame." It was a form of address he often used to Lady de Burgh. "I must go back first. There is much business to be attended to. When it is done I shall return. If my

cousin will marry me I shall buy a place here. There is much to be done in this sad, beautiful country which Honoria and I could do together. I could not ask her to begin life with me over there—where half of me is buried."

"You ought to have Castle Morrogh," Lady de Burgh said. "You know that it used to belong to the Fitzmaurices?"

"Neither Honoria nor I could wish to turn you out, Madame," he answered, with an inclination of his head.

Lady de Burgh wondered if the Don ever jested. Perhaps, poor man, one could not expect it of him, with that past. Well, well, Honoria could be gay enough, as Maurice could be whimsically gay. Honoria would bring the laughter back, perhaps, in time. He could not always have been so preternaturally grave.

"When do you go?" she asked as they walked up the long avenue of Castle Morrogh.

"On Monday, I think."

"So soon? You go to Dublin?"

"Yes. I shall be in Dublin for a day or two. It is better to go soon, since I must go."

There was a slight pause before Lady de Burgh spoke again. Then she said:

"Mary is due to pay a few weeks' visit to a school-friend who lives at Bray, near Dublin. Mrs. Penrose's house is too small to admit of her taking a maid. I have been wondering how I should send her up. I am very old-fashioned. I cannot approve of young ladies travelling alone."

Mr. Fitzmaurice cordially agreed. It was a practice detestable to him. If he might have the privilege of escorting Miss Mary, of delivering his precious charge safely into Mrs. Penrose's care—he laid his hand on his heart.

That was settled then, Lady de Burgh said, in a fluttering way. "You will come in to see Mary. My husband is out till dinner-time. Can I persuade you, Mr. Fitzmaurice, to dine with us to-night?"

Mr. Fitzmaurice thought it possible. He would be with them by eight o'clock.

Lady de Burgh went into the hall, which she found empty except for the dogs who gave her an uproarious welcome. The presence of the dogs lying before the fire, their noses on their paws, their disconsolate eyes joyful as they saw who came, assured her that Mary was somewhere out of the house and had left them in charge. Some strange uneasiness brooded in the mother's heart. The dusk was giving way to dark. She did not like Mary to be out. To be sure the afternoons darkened early now. If it had been Maurice she would not have minded. Maurice was tenderly careful about "Miss Mary." But Christopher Damer was quite another matter.

There was a table with writing materials in the hall. She sat down and wrote a letter. It was to Mrs. Penrose, telling her that she might expect Mary on Monday evening. Mr. Fitzmaurice, who was going to Dublin, had kindly promised to escort Mary. They were going to be very quiet at Castle Morrogh now their visitors had left or were going to

leave them. She was glad that Mary and Rosamund would have a little gaiety together.

When she had written her letter she dropped it in the post-bag—only just in time, for at the moment she heard the bicycle bell outside the hall door which betokened that the boy had come for the post-bag.

When it had been taken away she stood for a minute or two in front of the fire. A half sheet of paper, rolled to a ball and lying on the hearthrug at her feet, arrested her orderly eye.

She stooped to pick it up. Unconsciously she smoothed it out and glanced at what was written upon it. It was in her husband's handwriting.

"My dear De Luynes—You have once more helped me out of no end of a hole. I promise you I will keep my promise. . . ."

No more than that. Apparently at that point the letter had dissatisfied the writer and he had flung it, as he thought, into the fire, not noticing that it had fallen on to the floor.

She threw it into the fire now, feeling perturbed. What was the hole the Vicomte had helped Hugo out of? For the first time in her life she was angry with her husband for his silence about his business. It was part of his character that he believed in a man keeping money-matters in his own hands and his business to himself.

"Ask me for what money you want," he had said long ago in their early married days—"and I will supply it. As for how I handle what belongs to both of us I should like to feel that you trusted me."

That had been simple enough at the time. Hugo had been so transparent in those early days that he had had really no secrets from her. But for some years back —it had begun with prospecting for minerals on the estate—he had become more secretive. He resented being asked questions. Mystery was a somewhat alarming sign in a person like Hugo. When he began to wrap himself up in it his wife was perturbed.

The outside door of the hall opened and Sir Christopher and Mary came in. She could see them through the glass screen before they came into the inner hall and saw her. Christopher taking off his bag and laying it on the ground, standing his gun up in the corner, stamping with his feet as though he shook water out of his boots. Mary had removed her green hood and her gloves and laid them on a chair, before she sat down to get off her wet shoes.

She saw Christopher turn round ready to take off Mary's shoes; he had picked up a little pair of slippers from the corner of the hall and was looking down at them with that expression which always made Mary blush. It looked like the prelude to a bit of love-making which Lady de Burgh spoiled by hastily opening the door from the inner hall.

"Mary, child," she said, "you are very late. Have you had tea?"

Christopher stood with the shoes in his hand, looking slightly annoyed. Mary took them from him and herself put them on.

"We had tea with Bridget and Bawn," she said. "It looked so bright as we passed the lodge that we had to go in. It was not Christopher's

fault we were late. Bawn was so pretty sitting at her spinning-wheel, wearing her new scarlet skirt and white blouse. He said that you might be anxious. But I thought you would stay talking to Miss Roche once you went up there. Christopher ate seven of Bridget's potato-cakes and drank three large cups of strong tea."

Mary's eyes were shining and there was a wild colour in her cheeks. She had never looked like that with Maurice. She had not seemed to miss Maurice when he went. She had been oddly excited and out of herself of late.

Lady de Burgh had meant to tell Mary before dinner that she had arranged for her to go to the Penroses on Monday: but Mary was not in her room when she looked in on her way downstairs. Mary's green skirt lay on the floor. She had apparently stepped out of it and forgotten to hang it up.

Hanging up the little skirt in its proper place, the untidiness seemed to Lady de Burgh to indicate a disturbance and a troubling of her child's orderly existence. She wished Christopher had gone with his mother, or would go. They had brought the world into the cloistered peacefulness of Castle Morrogh, and it was a world that Elizabeth de Burgh hated for herself and dreaded for her child. Perhaps Christopher would go when he had no longer Mary to amuse him. If only Hugo would not urge him to stay. No use talking to Hugo, in that mood of an obstinacy which had become so much more marked of late.

Something recurred to her with a sense of vexation and trouble :

" *You have got me out of no end of a hole.*"

As she went downstairs she heard the click of the billiard balls and a sound of laughter from the billiard-room. Christopher had been teaching Mary billiards. She turned the door-handle, and the door opening quietly, she looked in. Mary was sitting on the end of the billiard-table, leaning sideways, holding the cue for the stroke. Christopher Damer was apparently adjusting the cue as it should be held. Mary was wearing her prettiest frock—a bunched up billowy white thing, from a good shop. Of late years she had not had many things from good shops—nor her mother either. Perhaps it was hardly necessary, living so quietly in the country.

She retreated, unnoticed by the young people, closing the door softly with a new slightly sore feeling against her husband. Christopher could be very agreeable, but she did not care for him : she did not like him and Mary being so much together. She had some instinct about Christopher. Her poor lamb! Was Christopher fascinating the child ? He would have gone with his mother to the great Scottish house only for Sir Hugo's persuasions to stay. Why should he stay on, seeing the gay doings that beckoned him ? Unless—it was Mary.

She told Mary in the drawing-room that she had written to Mrs. Penrose, arranging about the visit.

" You are going to have quite a gay time with Rosamund, my pet," she said. " I have been

saving up for you, and you are to have some new frocks."

"Yes?" said Mary, "you dear!" and wore a little air of dismay. But presently she was more cheerful and fell to discussing the frocks, to the great easing of her mother's anxiety.

Christopher would never allow his host to stay long in the dining-room. Sir Hugo had come into the drawing-room, with real or pretended unwillingness, of late, saying that he never knew such a fellow for joining the ladies, that good wine was wasted on him, with a somewhat heavy air of rallying the younger man.

This evening Christopher followed the ladies immediately, leaving his host and the Don together. Lady de Burgh sat apart by the little table which had her reading lamp upon it. There was a shelf of her favourite books underneath the table, spiritual books and books of the Irish renaissance—which were often spiritual books also—poetry, romance. Christopher had taken one or two books from their places one day and looked into them, and then at Lady de Burgh with amused eyes.

"I cannot make out what this fellow is driving at," he had said. It was a book of A.E.'s Essays. "Nor this fellow either"—it was a little book of the mystical writings of the Rev. John Tauler.

He had no clue to his cousin's sudden stiffening on that occasion. Yet he was no fool in his way.

Lady de Burgh watched him as he stood by the piano now, making an arbitrary selection of the

songs he wanted Mary to sing. He wanted "Land of Hope and Glory." Mary sang it obediently, though her soft wild voice had little to do with its crashing march music. He had grown tired of her Irish songs, and had in his masterful way sent for a selection of the songs most in vogue in London at the moment. The "Indian Love Songs" and "Two Eyes of Grey" had as little of affinity with Mary as "Land of Hope and Glory." Christopher did not care for the old English songs which Mary sang, any more than her Irish melodies. Handel and Arne, Purcell and Bishop, were out of fashion, as much out of fashion as the melodies. If Mary wanted an Irish song, why not "The Little Irish Girl," or some jolly thing like that?

Elizabeth de Burgh looked on with a queer distaste. How Mary obeyed him! Was it possible Christopher was gaining an ascendancy over her child? She felt as though there was going to be a struggle between her and Christopher for Mary, for Mary's soul. Mary's father was on Christopher's side. That was bitter. Was that why he had sent poor Maurice away hurt, ignoring the old friend, who must be hurt if Maurice was hurt?

Christopher, leaning over Mary, was rather splendid; the large blue eyes, the thick moustache, the easy air; many people accounted Christopher very handsome. He was "a dog with the girls," his mother had said, quoting someone. He was not pleasing in Elizabeth de Burgh's eyes. She said to herself that he had too much an air of well-being, of worldly prosperity. The spiritual

part—largely dominant in Elizabeth de Burgh's nature — rose against him, while she conceded that he had some reason for his air of well-being, for he had been successful in most things he had undertaken.

CHAPTER XI

THE ONE OUTSIDE

Turning his back on Castle Morrogh, the kind hospitable house which contained the creature he loved best perhaps on earth, the Vicomte shrugged his shoulders. Maurice glanced at him across the carriage and noticed the shrug, which meant a deal in a man of M. de Luynes' good-breeding. It said all manner of things which need not be more explicitly said, to Maurice, whose eyes looked as though he had not slept well.

When they were in the railway carriage going south which they had to themselves, themselves being Maurice, the Vicomte, and Judy, who was never handed over to the Vicomte's man in his third-class carriage, he harked back to a recent discussion between them.

"I have been thinking," he said, "my dear Maurice, about your wish for a business career. I have not slept very well of late, and things come to one lying awake at night. If by any chance you were free, earlier than we have foreseen—would your cousin, the Don, take you at Monterey? I understand he has vineyards. You talked of wine-growing as a form of business you would like."

"If I were free . . ." Maurice repeated after him, with a bending of his fine brows. "You do not mean that you are going to do without me?"

"Not exactly that, dear boy. I have come to depend on you so much that I must depend a little longer."

He brushed away the consideration of Maurice's freedom with a motion of the hand, as though he flicked away a little cigar ash.

"I think we may keep together for a while yet. You are so young that it will be no great wrong to you to have you with me—so long as I do not interfere with your education—a little longer. You are very dear to me, Maurice. Perhaps you will not be surprised to hear that I intend to lodge at Oxford during this winter term so as to see as much of you as possible."

"You think it will not be too low-lying, too relaxing for you?"

"Not at all. I shall try to get as high up as I can. Oxford has little hills near-by. It will be very good to see you from time to time. I shall miss your constant companionship—but that has to be. I shall have the old lady here."

He put out his hand and fondled Judy, now grown white about the muzzle, showing signs of age.

"And we shall hope for another Long Vacation—in the Tyrol perhaps, or in Sicily. I'm afraid I was a dull companion the last time and too easily tired. I feel stronger now. We may as well talk over things while we are in this undisturbed solitude. If you think of it there is no greater solitude than that

of a railway carriage. I made up my mind last night, lying awake, that I would speak to you fairly and openly. I told you that I shall not be able to do as well by you as I had hoped. When I—adopted you—yes, it was really that—I had every reason to believe that I could leave you a comfortable sum of money."

"Don't talk about it!" said Maurice, very red, and stumbling in his speech. "You have done everything for me. What I am you have made me. You remember what I was when you took me up. What would have become of me? I might have been a good sort of groom or perhaps a coachman. Honoria did not like it, but—I would not stay at school with the Christian Brothers, who were doing their best for me. I wanted the horses."

"You would have found your way out. It is the man makes the gentleman, not the position. Do you suppose I would have taken any stable boy into my life as I took you? Let all that go! You have meant a great deal to me. There will not be much left when I am gone. I do not bind you to stay the three years at Oxford as I at first intended. The money will be yours to do as you will with."

Leaning back against the cushioned carriage he looked very weary and old. A sudden alarm seized upon Maurice.

"You are not well," he said. "Let us give up this Oxford business and winter in Egypt as we did last year. You remember how well you were? Did not Dr. Adolph Meunier say Egypt again this winter?"

"He may have said it, but I have forgotten it—at least I believe he did say it." The Vicomte was fastidiously truthful. "Nevertheless I do not feel like Egypt, at least not just yet. Your English winters are often very good up to Christmas. I want to see you in the surroundings of Oxford. Afterwards—we shall see."

The train stopped at a small wayside station. The door of their first-class carriage was pulled open by a very ancient and anxious-looking porter.

"You'll maybe not mind them for a station or two," he said apologetically. "It's the pilgrimage, and the thirds is packed like sardines. Here, in wid ye, ma'am! Don't be lanin' out o' the window, Noreen, the same way you did last year when the door opened wid ye; you couldn't count on fallin' as soft another time. Yes—you change at Knockloghery, ma'am. Ax agin when you get to Galway. It's no use me tellin' you afraid you'd disremimber."

He was helping in a crowd of cloaked women, and head-shawled little girls, and flaxen-headed children while he talked—talking against possible protest doubtless.

No one protested except Judy, who, sitting in the furthest corner between the Vicomte and the window, growled quietly.

"Them little dogs do be very proud," said an old woman, depositing her basket at her feet.

The Vicomte was making the party as comfortable as possible, receiving many murmured blessings in return. He was always so curiously interested in

human nature and all that concerned it that he turned easily from his conversation with Maurice to hear all about the pilgrimage, which apparently was a big thing, since at every station a porter would open the door with a hopeful expression of face, changing to weary despair as he realised that the carriage was quite full. One or two, more hopeful than the rest, thought another couple might be accommodated and bade someone jump in, but retreated, slamming the door, when he was asked by those already in possession if he was not ashamed to be crowding up the gentlemen.

They were not alone again, for relays of passengers got in and out before they reached Bridge of Doon, where the Canon's outside-car awaited them. The afternoon had turned out beautifully clear and fine, with the fresh mildness of a fine October day. The priest himself was on the platform, delighted to welcome his old friend, and making anxious inquiries of the station-master about the little bit of mountain mutton and the small barrel of oysters he was expecting by the train, for he spoilt his friends, keeping his austerities for himself.

"Maggie'd go out of her mind if that bit of mutton hadn't come," he said, shaking hands warmly with each in turn. "You praised the mutton the last time you were here, De Luynes. Maggie has a wonderful memory, never having wasted it on school learning. Yes, thank you. All the same as usual. Lord Corrib'll be in to dinner and the young ladies afterwards. You're not looking at your best, De Luynes, nor Morry either. You'll pick up at the

Parochial House. The falls are in grand order. They never failed this year."

So talking, and at the same time pushing off various applicants for his notice, he got them on to the outside-car, on the box of which a small boy, with an inscrutable expression, sat holding the reins, gazing immovably between the ears of the young horse he was driving, which was pawing the ground, eager to be off.

"You remember Johnny, Vicomte. Johnny Quinn? You used to call him Solomon. You gave him the name yourself and it sticks to him. They call him nothing but Sol here about."

A pair of very blue eyes came back from looking between the horse's ears and dwelt on the Vicomte a second, while their owner touched a rather ragged cap in a military salute.

"No, no, come up to me to-morrow morning, or —stay—you're Bridget Casey, aren't you? Come to-night about nine. I'll see you then and see what I can do. Ah—here's the bit of mutton at last. You've put the oysters in the well, Tim? That's right. Here you are! Now we're off."

At last they *were* off, a shower of blessings following them.

"It's a very sad case, Bridget Casey's," said the Canon, arranging the rug over the Vicomte's knees. "I thought if she came up to-night I'd be able to say a word to Lord Corrib. Now that's a good man—and a good Irishman. But Bridget owes more than she'll ever pay off. And Tom's left her with a whole family of little children. You can't expect a

man to stand out of his rent and it years in arrears. I'm afraid Tom Casey owed the estate five hundred pounds. The poor thing will never pay it. She has no money to stock the land either. Mr. Warren says there's nothing for her but to give up the farm."

"You still go behind Mr. Warren's back?" asked the Vicomte with his quiet smile.

"Ah, you remember that? He's very good, the poor man, in forgiving me. He's as kind as justice to his employer will let him be. I don't meddle with Mr. Warren, unless I have to. There are times the Earl will say to Mr. Warren himself, 'Take that case to the Canon and let him settle it. You know he's your under-agent with full powers.'"

They were now driving along by the river, and the sound of the waterfall came to them like a distant thunder. The peace of the place began to fill Maurice's heart, which had been hurt and resentful. Sir Hugo had been almost rude to him. He had shown him with a cruel suddenness that he was not any longer to be accepted on equal terms. Maurice had always been a little afraid of Sir Hugo, though he had been friendly enough till just lately when Sir Christopher Damer had come. Damer—how he hated him! Hatred and the sense of wrong were not good things to brood upon. Worst of all, Mary had seemed to like Sir Christopher's company. For all her soft sympathetic looks he felt that his going had not grieved her. The thought of his enemy at Castle Morrogh, in daily, hourly association with Mary, maddened him. There was only one comfortable thing upon which he could rest his heart about his

leaving Castle Morrogh. Lady de Burgh had held his hands, had kissed him on the forehead, with understanding in her eyes and the tenderness of her manner as though heart answered heart. She had always treated Maurice almost as though he was her son.

The wide bare rooms at the Parochial House, so spotlessly clean, with the noise of the falls in every-one of them, brought a sense of peace to Maurice's irritation and soreness. He had been living in fine houses without being very conscious, or at all conscious, of their fineness. Now, with the rashness of youth, he was suddenly a violent Socialist. He hated fine houses and soft living, and fine garments and troops of servants.

Here was an absolute simplicity of living. He had left the Vicomte to his new man, Dubois—a recommendation of Dr. Adolph Meunier—who thought his master should rest before dinner. The Canon was receiving as many deputations as though he had been Irish Chief Secretary. There had been a crowd of people waiting to see him when they drove up to the hall door, and Maggie, the old housekeeper, had turned from her curtseying welcome of the favoured guests to explain that she couldn't get shut of them : no matter how often she told them the priest was engaged they wouldn't go. There was *some* brazen impidence in the world, to be sure !

Maurice's window in the end gable of the house directly overlooked the falls. All around on every side were the famous woods of Kilcreagh. The house might have been shut in too much by the

woods but that there was a cool air off the river, the wet spray of the waterfall was always in the atmosphere. It ascended now to Maurice as he leant out, damping his hair and his cheeks.

The woods were in all their autumnal colouring. As there had been no rain for a few days the leaves where they lay were dry and russet colour with a shade of purple in them, not so unlike the colour of Mary's hair.

He thought that everything had a particularly clean and ordered air. Above the falls the river stretched wide and unruffled, the trees crowding to the water's edge reflecting their glory in its unrippled surface. Midway on the water a swan preened its coat. Below the falls the river, disturbed for some distance, flowed between grassy banks, with grazing cattle in the fields at the far side. At the near side the road he knew mounted from the railway-station and turning in front of the house climbed by demesne walls and the lodges hung with fuchsia and ivy geranium to the higher country beyond.

The Parochial House was very restful. Everything was an old friend. There was the hard little bed on which Maurice had often slept dreamless sleep. In his present mood the hardness was something to grip on to with a fierce pleasure. He abhorred luxury of every kind. There was the clean sanded floor, the yellow-painted wardrobe, the washstand and table covered over their plain deal with white American cloth. One or two pious pictures on the wall; a crucifix; some writing materials on a centre table; a shelf of books. It was possible to have one's plunge

of mornings in a pool below the fall, so there was no need for a bath.

Here was all man required. Maurice was bitter against artificialities. What did a man want but to work with his two hands for his wife and children ? If there had been no horrible conventions, no riches, no luxury, he and Mary could have been together, he tilling the fields, planting, sowing, reaping, for her—and she keeping house for him, cooking his dinner, baking, sewing : he would come home of evenings tired, but not too tired to chop the wood for her for next day, and carry water for her, and do all the things he would not ask of her tender weakness.

Fierce thrills of delight ran through him as he imagined Mary and himself in some little Canadian farm. He wanted to carry her away from them all, all except her mother.

The thought of Lady de Burgh gave him pause. Mary in her short skirt of green and stout little brogues, the green hood over her dear red head, was not impossible in the picture—but,—Lady de Burgh ! She was very simple at heart, as he knew, but he recalled the trailing things she delighted to wear, the string of pearls about her neck and falling below her waist, the slender look of aristocracy.

He laughed angrily and his dream vanished. He remembered once again that about this time the wild geese would be crying in the air high over the bogs ; the strange blue of the bog skies might be reflecting itself in many pools ; and he could see two figures stepping out over the bogs—one rather small, a bright

spot of green on the browns and purples of the bogs, a taller figure going with it, side by side, leaning towards the little figure, with that manner of a close intimacy the very thought of which made Maurice see red.

CHAPTER XII

GOOD CHEER

A KNOCK at the door summoned Maurice to dinner, which at the Parochial House took place at the unfashionable hour of six. He had already dressed, with an inward protest against the absurdity of dress, less bitter because the Parochial House was exercising its wonted spell upon him. It was not easy to continue angry in its atmosphere; the sound of the Fall, for ever in the air, seemed to make the heart quiet. It was a cradle-song for sleep; and when Maurice had left he had missed the voice of the waterfall so much that his sleep was disturbed till he had grown accustomed to its absence and silence.

Lord Corrib had already arrived. He was in the priest's small sitting-room, which was walled about with books; there were a few Arundel prints on the wall, a large crucifix above the chimneypiece —for the rest comfortable, shabby chairs, a few photographs, one or two pieces of good Waterford glass, and a jug in faience which made a brilliant spot of light amid the soberness. The whitewashed room captured and held whatever of light there was in the skies, reflected it from the river. On the

worn hearthrug lay a blue Irish terrier, who had already greeted Maurice with effusion and now wagged his tail lazily at each new arrival.

Lord Corrib was a rosy, clean-shaven man, with side-whiskers, and very good honest blue eyes. He was standing with his back to the fireplace, listening to Canon O'Flanagan, who had apparently been expounding someone's need of relief. Maurice, as he came in, caught a word or two :

" There's the son going to Maynooth too, and that will cost the poor woman something, though he's got a bursary. It would be a nice thing of you, and you a Protestant, to help the poor boy to be a priest. I've got to go begging for his brother too, for a winter in his mother's little cabin is bound to give the disease a chance, and it's the boy himself we want to give a chance to."

" Anything more ? " asked Lord Corrib. " You are, as I have frequently observed before, a cormorant for asking."

" They say I'm your Lordship's understudy. But, come along ! The food won't be improving while we're talking. We can talk while we're eating."

The meal, beginning with oysters and soup, going on to chickens and bacon, with the bit of mutton to follow, was excellent although the service was of the plainest. The waiting-maid, an enchanting pink-cheeked child with a head of black satin, wearing a pink print bodice and holland skirt, was feeling uneasy the Canon explained to his guests, to Susy's great embarrassment, because she had not grown used to her boots.

"A pity too," he said, when she had retired, covered with blushes, "ever to cramp the little feet of them in ugly hard boots. It is a lovely thing, a child's foot, before the boot-maker's got at it."

A great many brilliant and highly-placed people had dined at Canon O'Flanagan's table without thinking very much of the food laid before them, because of their delight with the mental fare they received. The Canon occasionally referred to one of these distinguished guests—"I said to Mr. Balfour—he was sitting just where you are;" or "Mr. Wyndham, God rest his soul, said to me, standing there on the hearthrug;" or "The day the Prince came over to see me."

Not that he was a snob. Very far from it. He loved his humble friends, and it was not at all unusual for a child who had come with a message—barefooted and tousled—to be introduced to the distinguished company and fed on the dainties which had been provided for them.

The good stories went round the table. The Canon had just told one of a farmer in the fair who was told by another man: "That's Lord Corrib goin' down there. Ye wouldn't believe that man has twenty thousand a year!" "For goodness' sake," said the other, "an' I hear he's never been seen drunk!"

"Wasted opportunities," concluded the priest. "And sure enough, just as I said it here's Maggie with the materials. I suppose Susy wouldn't come back again, Maggie?"

"She took fright of his Lordship and the gentle-

men," old Maggie said: "so I had pity on her, your Reverence—more be token she might have dropped the tray and burnt the house down wid the spirit-lamp, let alone breakin' the Waterford glass-jug that your heart's in."

She put down the silver tray, with glasses and the hissing spirit-kettle and all the paraphernalia of punch-making, before the Canon, who proceeded to manipulate, as he called it.

"You remember poor Lord Rostrevor," he said. "He never thought anyone could make punch but himself. I always gave up my place to him to keep him from watching me with that terrible eye of his. You had to drink it too when it was made whether you liked it or not. He once made a poor boy who had the pledge for life swallow a glass of punch. The boy had a stutter. 'Drink it while it's hot,' he said, 'and talk afterwards.' He was really sorry when he knew what he'd done, and insisted on the boy's going off and taking the pledge again. 'Why didn't he speak?' said he, as though he ever gave the poor boy a chance. And that reminds me—talking of poor boys—what about Mrs. Casey?"

"Does Warren know about it?"

"What's the good of talking to Mr. Warren? It's his business to get in the rents."

"He says the people are growing extravagant," Lord Corrib remarked, with a sly twinkle in his eye—"better houses, better food, better clothes, a desire for social enjoyment. He says the farmers' daughters have given up butter-making and poultry and taken to dressmaking and the piano instead; that they

have two or three new dresses in the year where a new dress was unknown in the old days."

"Dear, dear!" said the priest, peeling a pear in a leisurely fashion. "Putting your rents into their garments. Very bad, very bad. But I'm glad Eve's showing herself in her daughters long as she was suppressed. The days are changed since Michael Cleary's eleven sons got a new suit every Christmas —handed down, you understand. 'Twas Michael got the suit from the shop. Youth was no advantage there."

Maurice sipped his wine-glassful of the punch—the Canon was nearly as great a stickler as Lord Rostrevor, the famous judge, for his punch being drunk—and was silent. He was thinking that if it was not that the Vicomte needed him it would be good to get out of this old world to a newer, freer air. He wondered if the antiquated conventions and distinctions of the Old World had reached Monterey; or if there was any simplicity of living left anywhere. Again his thoughts wandered to Castle Morrogh, where at this hour Mary would be entertaining Sir Christopher, perhaps playing billiards with him or talking by the fire in the hall. The hours between tea and dinner-time were so very friendly at Castle Morrogh that people were in no hurry for lamplight, but liked to enjoy the Blind Man's Holiday of firelight till the dressing-bell rang.

He came back from thoughts which tortured him to the knowledge that the Canon was trying to persuade Lord Corrib to consider and deal with Mrs. Casey's business himself.

"You know I give you almost plenipotentiary powers," Lord Corrib said. "Poor Warren has some justice on his side. He says he only gets the dirty work to do."

"Isn't that what you pay an agent for? Well, I acknowledge you've done a deal to make me popular. All the same I'm getting a scruple over that same popularity. I want you to have it, not me. It's no more than your due."

"Why should I have it?"

"You know there's no man living likes it better than yourself. It's only a god or a beast that doesn't care for popularity. Finish up your punch now. The ladies will be here soon, and the curate is coming to take a hand at Spoil Five. Lady Brigid likes a game; and Morry, who never could learn when to put in the Ace of Hearts and when to keep it, can talk to Lady Cushla."

Maurice got rid surreptitiously of the punch, which always gave him a headache. He turned it into his finger-bowl, one of the sophistications which appeared at the Canon's dinner-table. There was a story that a raw young *locum tenens* for Dr. Rafferty, dining with a small but distinguished company at the Canon's table, had remarked, as he helped himself to strawberries, ladling them into his finger-bowl, that it was wonderful how well up we were in "hygeene" these days, and that nothing wanted washing more than strawberries. Upon which the Canon's strawberries went into his finger-bowl as did those of an illustrious guest. The end of that story was that the young doctor took occasion to

remark that he was surprised at how many people ate their strawberries unwashed. "And they're right," said the Canon in cheerful assent. "Washing spoils them. We're too faddy about things now-a-days."

In the sitting-room, under the eyes of the Crucifix and the sacred pictures, the party sat down to Spoil Five. The Ladies FitzWalter had arrived—fresh wholesome creatures with ready laughter and soft voices, who wore the most discreet of evening dresses, their round white shoulders veiled by their scarves of exquisite old Limerick lace.

Lady Cushla had taken her father's hand temporarily while he saw Mrs. Casey. Presently the Canon was sent for and Maurice had to take his hand. Father Hannigan, the curate, a little man, ordinarily so meek that people said he only knew his friends by their boots, became very assertive as soon as he got the "paste-boards" between his fingers. He rated the whole party except Lady Brigid, who was, like himself, an enthusiast for the game. Lady Cushla had not the root of the matter in her; the Vicomte only played for politeness, to please other people: Maurice was sleepy because of a succession of bad nights and the lulling call of the waterfall.

"Two games gone out in three hands," said Father Hannigan bitterly—"and only one and threepence in the pool each time! Mr. Roche, you're fit to lose a bank, so you are. I wouldn't like to be your partner, often, so I wouldn't."

Maurice, abashed, expressed his sorrow; and let the next game go out by inadvertently throwing his Five on Father Hannigan's Knave.

"You'll come to a bad end," said Father Hannigan in gloomy anger. "Playing for yourself, that's what you were. A selfish game I call it. There were ten of us partners the other night at Mrs. Creagh's and only two cards out, and we kept the game in till there was two pounds in the pool. 'Twas won at last by a young lad that had to come in when the doctor was called away to a case. He hadn't paid three sixpences into it, and he won it and went home with it. He said it was no use beginning again and he'd better go while he had the money."

Maurice protested that he had not intended to play selfishly, but Father Hannigan took no notice, only bidding Lady Brigid to cut the cards, with, if anything, an added shade of gloom.

The situation was relieved by the return of Lord Corrib and the Canon, the latter wearing his broadest smile.

"We've been picking your father's pocket," he said to the young ladies. "Or perhaps it would be truer to say he's been picking his own. He's wiped off Mrs. Casey's arrears and given her a few hundred to stock her farm as well. And she can send her boy to college now and the other poor chap for a cure. The woman's gone off only touching the ground in an odd place for delight. She's called down all the blessings of Heaven on the Family and James will offer his first Mass for your father's conversion."

"There won't be any Riviera this spring, girls," said Lord Corrib, with an air of resignation. "I'll have to make up to Warren somehow. That is if

he doesn't leave me. It's bad enough for the poor fellow to have the Canon as a sort of sub-agent, with more powers than the agent, without me acting as my own sub-agent and playing the deuce with economic considerations."

Lady Cushla whispered to Maurice when they had retired from the game that the Vicomte was not looking well. Glancing across at the Vicomte, who was surveying his cards with an anxious and rather puzzled gaze, Maurice's heart sank to the exclusion of the aching jealousy of his rival's place by Mary de Burgh. The Vicomte had certainly grown small. His hair and moustache were very white. Not so long ago the moustache and eyebrows had been ebon-black. The delicate refined old face looked very thin. One hand fondled Judy, who lay close to him on the sofa where he sat. Judy had seen with satisfaction the blue Irish terrier banished to the kitchen. She was accustomed to dogs being banished for her; and she had become rather selfish and taken up with herself as the years went by. But she was none the less dear to her owner because of that.

Her whitening muzzle rested on the Vicomte's knee; while his thin hand, showing the veins, and mottled with dark spots, played with her long ears.

Maurice's heart fell swift as an arrow and lay horribly leaden. What had he been thinking of? There was one thing he could not bear; one love beyond disturbing jealousy and passion, and he was threatened with its loss.

He turned with an anguished whisper to the kind, rosy girl.

"You don't think he looks *very* ill?"

"No, no. You see, we are always looking at Papa. He is so ruddy. The Vicomte has always been pale. The black clothes, the touch of scarlet in the ribbon he is wearing, make him look paler. Don't think about it, Morry. Will you come beagling with us to-morrow? Ten o'clock at the Cross Roads. We shall expect you to lunch afterwards. The Vicomte too, of course—and the Canon if he can get away. Oh, do listen to Father Hannigan asking Brigid with icy politeness if she usually plays the Ace of Hearts on the Five when she has a saver! There is the Canon making a joke of it all. Do tell me how Lady de Burgh is. Is she as beautiful as ever? And dear Mary . . ."

The Ladies FitzWalter were devoted admirers of Lady de Burgh, who had many lovers among the young of her own sex. She complained sometimes laughingly that girls *would* fall in love with her and set her on a pedestal.

"And dear Mary—is she as madly Irish as ever? Papa calls her a Fenian and says it is her mother's fault. But he thinks just as much of Lady de Burgh as we do, though in a different way. Some people call *him* a Fenian, though he calls himself a Devolutionist. Lord Monkstown does. He says—'Give me an honest Fenian and not one in disguise.'"

Maurice replied in a rather listless way that Lady de Burgh was as sweet and Mary as much of a Fenian

as ever. He forced himself to mention Christopher Damer, with an air of indifference, as a visitor at Castle Morrogh.

"Oh!" said Lady Cushla—"we met them in London. The mother was horrid. Papa did not like Sir Christopher. He said he was exaggerated—height, good-looks, manners, everything. Brigid and I felt the same. But lots of girls are in love with him, I believe. After all—poor thing!—such a mother! Some people think him—not just quite . . ."

Her pause was eloquent. Maurice listened in gloomy satisfaction. Lady Cushla had summed up Sir Christopher. He was not just *quite*. Maurice Roche, escaped from being a stable boy because the Vicomte de Luynes had taken a fancy to him, sat in judgment on Sir Christopher Damer, Etonian, ex-Guardsman, man of fashion, politician, and declared him—not just quite.

Lying awake before the fall had lulled him as in tender arms, he wished that Mary could have heard that good comrade, Lady Cushla FitzWalter. He had a horrid feeling that Mary, perhaps knowing that Christopher was "not quite," had yet some feeling for him she could not help: that he had some fascination for her which she was not able to cast off.

There were others besides Mary. There was little Bawn O'Connor, Mary's foster-sister. He had seen her redden under Christopher's languid gaze, and Maurice had wanted to kick him. There was no accounting for women. He called Christopher hard names in his fury. If it had only been a question

of defending Mary against him, the boy who adored her would have stood up to twenty Christophers for her sake. But, alas, when it was a question of saving Mary from herself! He writhed and tossed on his bed for hours before the waterfall exercised its wonted spell upon him.

CHAPTER XIII

BAWN

The announcement that Mary was going to Dublin on the Monday, taking advantage of Mr. Fitzmaurice's making the same journey to secure an escort, was not pleasing either to Sir Hugo or Christopher Damer. Sir Hugo showed his displeasure openly at the breakfast table when the proposed journey was mentioned.

"Must Mary go while Christopher is with us?" he asked, lifting his eyebrows in an irritated surprise. "I should have thought her visit to her friends might have waited."

"The visit was arranged some time ago," Lady de Burgh explained gently. "Edmund Penrose and his wife and babies and their ayah are coming home next month and Lismara will be filled to overflowing. You see, it has all been arranged, Hugo. Any alteration would have upset other people's plans. I am sure Christopher understands that."

"Oh, quite," said Christopher, and shot a challenging glance from his wide-open blue eyes at Lady de Burgh. She returned it. It was as though they measured strengths.

Sir Hugo was more explicit with his wife when they were alone. What had come over him? He had always been so devoted, so admiring a husband. He actually scowled on her who had been his heart's delight. Thinking over it afterwards, Elizabeth de Burgh had a curious intuition. There was something the matter with Hugo. He was angry with her, after their perfect years together, because there was something wrong which he did not choose to tell her.

"Elizabeth," he asked—he was very transparent after all. To be sure they had never had secrets from each other—"you are usually a sensible woman. What is there against Christopher? Mary seems to like him and his case is obvious. I *know* you are sending Mary away on purpose."

"She had promised to go—but Rosamund might have come here instead. You would not think, seriously, of Christopher for our girl?"

There was an incredulous pain in her voice.

"Why not? He is a very good chap. Had a bit too much of his own way perhaps and been spoilt by the women: but Mary would soon settle that. Look at my case! You have twisted me around your little finger."

The attempt at jocosity, with the boyish sulkiness of his face, somehow touched his wife. She felt that in his heart of hearts he did not choose Christopher for Mary.

"In all my dreams of what Mary's husband would be like I never thought of Christopher Damer," she said slowly, and there was bitterness in her thoughts.

"Oh no, I suppose not. Christopher's just an ordinary man. Most women think him very handsome. He's got pots of money and he's very good-natured. What else does a girl want?"

"Some girls, perhaps, might be satisfied. Not Mary."

She was rather horrified at that "pots of money." It was very unlike Hugo, who had never been worldly.

"If it was left to you the girl would be an old maid," he said. "We know what mothers are. No one good enough for their dear daughters. Maybe you'd have preferred Morry Roche. *He* hung about Mary and no one seemed to object. It was left to me to enforce the proprieties. Damn it, I don't see Morry Roche and Mary, if you do."

She looked at him in a wonder that was sharper than a rebuke.

"I always knew Maurice was to be trusted," she said. "I wish you had left it to me, Hugo. I'm afraid you hurt poor Maurice—and the Vicomte, who would feel any unkindness to the boy. It was so unlike you."

He turned on his heel and went off. She knew that way in her husband. If he felt he was in the wrong he always went away.

"Mary likes Christopher," he said, as a parting shot; and she saw him go through the hall and out-of-doors.

His saying it only confirmed his wife's fears. She had seen Mary's blush and smile when Christopher entered a room, her swift downward glance, as she had noticed Christopher's manner of triumph with

her girl. It sickened her with disappointment. She could not have told what she had against Christopher that she should so hate the thought of him as Mary's lover. Perhaps she was jealous of her only child as Hugo had seemed to suggest. No. She acquitted herself of that. She could have put herself aside when it was a question of Mary's happiness. She had some instinct about Christopher. He was not the man to give her dear Irish girl to. She was sure of it. The thought of such a marriage filled her with fierce repugnance.

She kept Mary busy up to the time of her departure. There were a couple of wet days and Christopher kept to the house, knocked the billiard balls about, sometime during the afternoon went out riding and came back splashed to the neck with mud. There was no hunting yet. The opening meet was on October 24. Mary had always been out under her father's wing. Sir Hugo grumbled because Mary would be in Dublin this year, shut up in a house full of women, instead of hunting with him in the wind and rain as she had done since she was a small child wearing a little green velvet cap on the tumbling masses of her red curls.

The house was very lonely without Mary. Lady de Burgh did not see much of Sir Hugo or of Christopher. She felt vaguely that Christopher was angry. He showed it by a certain exaggerated politeness into which she read enmity. It was a busy time of year with Sir Hugo. He was out pretty constantly with his gun or going long rides alone. She seldom saw him between breakfast and dinner-time: their relations

were strained: she could not bear to think of it. Hugo had never ceased to be her lover. There was pain in her eyes, in her voice, in the flame of her cheeks.

Christopher amused himself. He became very friendly with the few families who were within riding-distance. There was Lady Merrilees, the widow of an Admiral, who lived over at Creesk. Lady Merrilees had a daughter, Eleanor, very pretty still, but not so pretty as she had been a few years back. They had called one day and had offered Christopher hospitality whenever he came their way. Now that he was on his own hands so to speak, he went to see the Merrilees, or he found himself in their direction and partook of their hospitality, pretty frequently. There were also the Edgeworth-Blakes at Cloona, who were very glad to see him. He was so very good-looking and so very prosperous that he could not fail to flutter the hearts of the young ladies to whom he made himself so agreeable—none of them quite so young as they had been.

Without reference to his wife Sir Hugo had pressed Christopher to stay on, and Christopher had agreed, apparently not noticing his hostess's coldness. Was it possible he meant to stay out Mary's Dublin visit and be still there when she returned? Lady de Burgh began to fear it. She wore a look of pained bewilderment in those days that would have hurt Mary, or the Vicomte, or Maurice, if they had been there to see it. For the first time in her life she and Hugo were in opposite camps.

The poor lady was terribly puzzled about it all.

She was aware that her husband did not look well. His profile against a window struck her one day by its haggardness. He had lost his stateliness of bearing, and no longer held himself erect as he had been used to. Was anything wrong with Hugo, she wondered fearfully ? And if there was, why had he shut out her—his wife ? She thought fretfully that if it had not been for Christopher's presence they would surely have arrived at some explanation long before this. She disliked Christopher the more that he came between them.

She had always plenty to do for the people to keep her occupied. The village, the little country town, still brought her its affairs. Father D'Alton, the parish priest, who had been at the Irish College at Salamanca and was a very delightful old gentleman, talked of her as his Generalissimo. Helping other people through their difficulties or anxieties she eased her own burden. It was always comfortable to know that the people loved her; that in all the cottages "Miss Mary" was on every tongue. She would be always their Miss Mary. It comforted her while it gave her a fiercer repulsion for Christopher Damer that he should be able to bring the look of love to Mary's face.

There was another cause of distraction in the hitch in the affairs of Bawn O'Connor, Mary's foster-sister, Bawn of the milk-white skin, the dark blue eyes and black hair, of the height and slenderness, the promise of a flowing soft beauty with greater maturity.

Bawn had been the pet pupil of the Convent. She was very refined naturally, and the nuns had added

certain accomplishments to the education they had given her. Honoria Roche had suggested to Lady de Burgh more than a year back that Bawn's bringing-up might make for complications.

"You've made a pet of the child, my Lady," she had said with understanding, "and the nuns spoil her—not that she's spoilt. Then Miss Mary being so affectionate with her, and she in and out of the Castle as she is and being fond of reading and music, what I want to know is what's to become of the child? It might be the best thing for her to be a nun, but then again she mightn't have the call, and Bridget's not strong in the chest and perhaps she shouldn't leave her mother. The men that will want to marry her she won't look at; and I don't like to think of a pretty thing like her growing to be an old maid like myself."

Lady de Burgh had smiled at the picture of Honoria as an old maid. There was not much old maidishness about Honoria's splendid maturity, yet there was a little sadness in the smile. Bawn's case and Honoria's were not unlike each other.

She had been sufficiently impressed by what Honoria had said to discuss with Bridget the question of placing Bawn out in the world. Bridget was not averse from the idea of coming back to the Castle to live if only a suitable arrangement could be made for Bawn. There were the two nurseries, which were once her domain, empty: and there was plenty of sewing and mending which she could do better there than in her own lodge, surrounded by trees, which was not quite the best place for anyone's

health. It was difficult to keep Castle Morrogh fairly dry in winter, even with roaring fires, and Castle Morrogh was lifted up, high above the lodge at the south gate to which one went between beautifully arched trees, descending all the time.

Lady de Burgh had gone to her friend, Dame Ethelburga of St. Oswald's Abbey in Wiltshire, with her difficulty about Bawn, and Dame Ethelburga had promised to help. Her sister was in a Spanish Abbey of the Order. Very often the English House was asked to send out English-speaking governesses for the children of the Spanish grandees. Such a position might be found for Bawn.

Bawn's eyes had sparkled when this prospect was laid before her, and then she had turned with a little cry to kiss her mother. But when it was pointed out to her that her mother was to go back to the nurseries and all the comfort of Castle Morrogh, to say nothing of those twin stars her Ladyship and Miss Mary in and out all day rejoicing Bridget's heart, she began to be joyful again. Pretty Bawn had a vein of adventure in her which marked her as not destined for the Convent. She wanted to go out and see the world, and it was a natural desire. Life at the South Lodge, for a girl "set above her station," as the neighbours said, by the wonderful notice taken of her by her Ladyship and Miss Mary, was cramping to a young thing.

Bawn had begun long ago on her outfit for Spain, the thin black dresses of woollen and silk stuff which her Ladyship thought would be safe for such a position when it came, her stock of delicate under-

clothing, adorned with her own embroideries; she was an excellent needlewoman. She had anticipated the coming adventure with delight, had been impatient to hasten its coming, while she tried to conceal her eagerness from her mother by greater demonstrations of love than were common between them.

Now, at last, the summons had come; and Bawn was taking it, so eagerly anticipated, as though it were a death-sentence. There was no accounting for the ways of girls. Poor Bridget was vexed at what seemed ingratitude and caprice in her girl.

Lady de Burgh was puzzled. Little lines of puzzlement in her smooth fair forehead began to deepen and threaten to become permanent. Of course Bawn ought to go. She was to have the escort, for the difficult part of the journey, of a couple of lay-sisters travelling from St. Oswald's to the Spanish house, who would meet her at Euston. There were some four weeks before she need go.

Of course she need not go against her will, Lady de Burgh said. There was no real obligation for her to go, only, it happened to be a particularly nice opening. The young daughters of the Marquis de Zucchero required an English nursery-governess, who would find everything delightful in this proudest of Castilian families. Only the influence of Lady de Burgh with Dame Ethelburga could have secured anything so particularly desirable for Bawn. Of course there was still time if Bawn really wished to stay at home. Dame Ethelburga would know of other girls only too glad to seize upon such an excel-

lent chance. Lady de Burgh's voice was chilly as she said it. It was really too annoying of Bawn to behave like a child when such a prospect was offered to her.

Being told she need not go the girl's mood changed. She looked frightened and said she only wished to go at once. Need she wait for the escort of the two lay-sisters? Was it not possible to start at once, to get the dreadful parting over?

Lady de Burgh did not know what to make of Bawn, whom she had always found gentle and amenable. She supposed it was a rather terrifying prospect for little Bawn leaving this sheltered cove for the great deep. She was in as great a hurry now to be gone as though she had not shrunk from the going. Well, after all, she could understand that Bawn wanted to get the thing over without having twenty-eight days or so to consider it.

It was an added worry, this inexplicable behaviour of Bawn's; and Bridget fretted about it, wished that if Bawn was to go, it might be over and done with. All preparations were made. There was nothing to do but to fold one's hands and wait till the third week of November. It seemed a hard thing to Bawn, who alternated, as the days passed, between a feverish desire to be gone and floods of tears because she must go.

Mary was expected home about the time of Bawn's departure, and wrote that she must see her foster-sister before she left. Perhaps they might meet in Dublin, if Bawn could not await her return.

Mary's affectionate messages only made Bawn

weep. If a thing was to be done it was better to get it over, she said, and it would be only breaking her heart to say good-bye to Miss Mary. She'd rather go without seeing her. Sure, if it came to that she might not be able to go at all.

The summons came, before Mary was ready to return, so suddenly that it was a matter of a few hours. Time enough of course to telegraph to Mary to meet Bawn if only Bawn had not seemed to dread the meeting. After all, it would disturb her, making her suffer the pangs of parting a second time. So Bawn passed through Dublin on the eve of Mary's return and they did not meet.

Bawn gone, Elizabeth de Burgh breathed more freely. That trouble was over. She knew that Bawn would be as happy as the day with the Zuccheros. What a chance for the child! And Mary would be coming in a few hours. She could taste the whole joy of Mary's return now that Christopher had taken himself off, without any question of return. She had never felt so kindly towards Christopher as when he said that he must go.

CHAPTER XIV

EXPLANATIONS

A DAY or two before Bawn's going and Mary's return Christopher had scowled and bitten his lip over a letter he had opened at the breakfast table.

"I'm afraid I shall have to cross to-night," he said. "Such a nuisance! Old Joliffe is dead and they want me to stand for Almsbury. Warden writes that my presence is imperative; I am so sorry."

"The writ cannot issue till Parliament meets," said Sir Hugo, obviously annoyed. "Must you go?"

"I fear I shall have to. The Radical, Jones, will take some beating. You see, no one expected Joliffe's death, and the Radicals are strong in Almsbury. Those confounded factories they are opening all over the country have brought them in myriads."

"Oh, if you must go!" said Sir Hugo in a chilly voice, and expressed no more regrets, conventional or otherwise.

Lady de Burgh had remained silent. The troubled pucker in her forehead had smoothed out a little. She was so happy that Christopher was going before

Mary's return—in a hurry too, so that he would hardly try to see her on his way through Dublin.

"You have been very hospitable, Cousin Elizabeth," he said, turning to her with that mockery in his eyes which none would have detected but herself. "I am so sorry I shall not see Mary again. Perhaps you will have me later on when I have beaten Mr. Jones?"

Sir Hugo answered for his wife that they would be glad to see Christopher, but there was no cordiality in his voice. Obviously he was very much put out. After the visitor had departed he came into his wife's little room, full of pictures and books, bits of old china, old silver, many mementoes of friends and foreign travel, a room which some people had found steeped in a quiet and innocent atmosphere in which nothing but things fair and good could abide.

She was reading a little spiritual book, which she laid down as he entered. He had no scruple about interrupting her at such moments. It would have hardly occurred to him that the book his wife was reading was a spiritual book.

He stood with his back to the bright fire, looking down at her. Even at that moment, though he was vexed and disturbed, he felt the peace of her presence. After all, there was no one like Elizabeth. To be estranged from Elizabeth was to be out in a cold world.

"Well," he said, "Christopher found a very flimsy pretext for leaving us."

"Was it flimsy?"

"Considering there can't be an election till

February and Almsbury's as safe as the Bank of England. I expect he grew tired of your cold-shouldering him at last. I wonder he stood it so long."

"I am very sorry . . ." she faltered. Then the truth came in a rush. "I simply could not endure that there should be anything between Christopher and Mary."

The appeal in her eyes moved him. Suddenly his real love for her flooded his heart with tenderness and compassion. He had been behaving badly to her, the creature he loved best in the world—his good angel, as he well knew. He had an impulse towards confession and acted on it before cold fear could silence him.

"*I* don't want Christopher for Mary," he said, "only—only I am in the deuce of a mess, Elizabeth. I ought to have told you before. The worry of it has been making me a surly brute to you, my darling."

"What is it?" she asked, cold at heart, but comforted and with tenderness in her eyes. "Tell me. You should have told me before. You can trust my love."

"I've been gambling, Elizabeth, with your money and my own. No, no—nothing of disgrace," he answered the terrified question in her eyes—"it is bad enough, but not that. It means poverty for us unless I can right myself. I owe De Luynes a lot of money. It has been going on for a long time. I've wanted to tell you, but I was afraid."

"Of me?" she asked, with a trembling lip, while she smiled—a smile like winter sunshine.

She stood up, and going to him laid her cheek against his arm.

"Poor Hugo!" she said tenderly. "Imagine your being afraid of me. So you thought that if Mary married Christopher his wealth would help us?"

"I'm not so sure of that," he answered, smoothing back with a fond hand the waves of her beautiful hair. "Christopher knows how to stick to his money. But I thought if anything happened to me that Mary would be safe and see you safe. Damn it all, I don't want Christopher's money!"

She smiled at his violence as though she liked it —for once.

"As for me," she answered, "I cannot imagine any future in which you were not. But we need not consider such things. We can retrench. It is a big place, and we have kept it up with dignity. Your successor—our successor—when that comes, will have no cause to complain. We can't let the place suffer. But we can do the things other people do. There was that American who bade you name your price for a three years' tenancy of Castle Morrogh. You treated him with scorn."

"I was not so deep in then," he said. "I've been dashed unlucky. Somehow I've always come in at the end of a boom. Rubber now!"—he groaned. "I'd have made twenty thousand last year if I'd sold. And now the shares are not worth five shillings a-piece. Do you remember that thousand pounds old Lady Beamish left you, which I said I'd invest for you? That was the beginning of it. I doubled it in three months. If I'd only stopped then! You

are the most generous woman alive. You never asked me what I had done with your thousand pounds."

"It does not matter"—she brushed it away with a sweep of her hand. "The thing now is to recover ourselves. We might let to the American. It would be no hardship. We could travel: it would be good for Mary: there is no such education as travel. Letting the house should rid us of all sorts of expense."

"So we could. You would not hate it, Elizabeth? I want to—to insure my life for a good sum. It will be expensive, at my age, but I must do it. In fact, I am in correspondence with an insurance company. I shall have to go up to Dublin to see them about it. I wish I had done it when we were young: but there seemed no need. Everything has depreciated so much in value since the Land League, and all this confounded new legislation. We thought the land the most solid of all securities, and it has failed us. We've been going down-hill a long time. That was why I gambled, having once got bitten with the fever. A lucky stroke would have meant so much."

She did not say a word of reproach. It was not her way. She asked instead:

"How much do we owe the Vicomte?"

He named a sum which startled her.

"All that?" she said quietly.

"Yes; I told you it had been going on for years. A thousand pounds now and a thousand pounds again."

"He was never very rich," she said. "I fear he may have felt it."

"He is the best friend in the world. Of course I

know he thinks the world of you, Elizabeth. He put it to me like this—that all he had he meant to leave to Mary. That was before he took up Morry Roche. He told me he had kept no receipts. Of course he shall be paid. But I believe he has money left. I hope he has."

"For Maurice," she suggested.

Sir Hugo looked guilty.

"The boy should be able to stand on his own feet," he said sullenly. "The Vicomte has given him a wonderful chance. He has educated him and made a gentleman of him."

"Not *made*," said his wife softly.

"Oh well, I know your partiality for young Roche. He is well enough. He has used the advantages De Luynes has given him. He should stand by himself."

To Lady de Burgh the house felt lighter and happier for Christopher's departure. She began to make preparations for Mary's return. It would be good to have Mary back now that Christopher was gone. There was a renewal of peace and love between husband and wife. Indeed, the love had never failed them. Elizabeth de Burgh knew all there was to know, and had set herself to meet the difficulties. Of course their debts must be paid, every penny. She had written an affectionate veiled letter to the Vicomte, who by this time was in Paris. Maurice had begun his first term at Oxford. The Vicomte wrote in reply that he was missing his boy very much, but the excellent Meunier had positively forbidden his wintering at Oxford. He would see Maurice at

Christmas, and they might run across to Ireland. For the rest Dubois took great care of him. He made no reference to the veiled matter of her letter except to remind her that he owed nearly all the happiness of his life to her and those she had given to him.

She began to hope that Hugo's coldness towards Maurice might now disappear. So many things had been better since the Damers had taken their shadow from her door that she might hope to have the old happy relations once again.

Lady de Burgh had been installing Bridget in the old nurseries. Someone else was to have the South Lodge to whom rheumatism was as yet a far-off ailment of old age.

It was a distraction to Bridget, fretting for Bawn, to return to her old kingdom, where she was setting up the household gods, too precious to be sold to the new tenant of the lodge with the chairs and table and dresser and beds and bright crockery and kitchen utensils and the hens and all the rest. There was plenty of room in the large nurseries for Bridget's little altar where the lamp was to be kept lighted for Bawn, for the china dogs and the lustre jugs and the tin-type photographs of Bridget's husband and some relations in America; for Bawn's pretty trifles, of which there were a good many. One suggestion of her mistress's had dried Bridget's tears. It was that if Bawn found life at such a distance from home intolerable, she could come back and make the inner nursery her own room till such time as she could be provided for nearer home. Bawn had sent a cheerful post-card from Holyhead. And Miss Mary was

coming home. Mary was as dear to the nurse's heart as her own child: and it was always happiness for Bridget to be with her adored mistress, absence from whom at the South Lodge had been exile.

Lady de Burgh had left Bridget arranging the nurseries so far as possible in the way she was used to have them—the sewing-machine there; the low chair on which she had once sat to bath a precious baby, there; Miss Mary's high chair by the table. There were Miss Mary's books and toys, as many as had not been given away to other children, in the cupboards—or "presses" as Bridget called them—Miss Mary's coloured pictures of animals were on the walls; over the outer door leant the pictured angel who had kept the nurseries when Mary was a little one; above the mantelpiece was the Madonna with the Holy Child and St. John, dear to Mary's uncompanioned childhood. The little St. John with an archly-daring expression touched the dimpled foot of the sleeping child; and the Mother, finger on lip, smilingly held him in check. It was a picture that Mary dearly loved now, as then.

It afforded Mary's mother a strange pleasure to have the nurseries occupied once more, even if it was only for a while, while they waited on Mr. Van Brunt's decision. She had often said that it was a strange fate that left her the mother of one when she desired her arms full of children. Not that she was not satisfied with her Mary, she would make haste to add.

On the eve of Mary's return Lady de Burgh was going up the hill to visit Honoria. She was aware

of a lightening and brightening in Honoria these dark days when the winter was just drawing in, as though some joy filled her and overflowed for all to see. Honoria had not confided in her so far; but on her way up she met Kate O'Malley, an old woman who had been a housemaid at Castle Morrogh in Sir Pierce's time, and still claimed many privileges because of that.

"There's some onaisiness on her above there"—she pointed her thumb over her shoulder in the direction she was coming from. "She can't sell you a stamp but what she's laughin'. She's got rale giddy."

"I'm glad Miss Roche is in good spirits," Lady de Burgh replied. "It's a lonesome place for all that the village is only just out of sight on the slope of the hill."

"I often wondered how she contínted herself her lone," said Kate. "A man's company, even if he does bate you. I think she'll be gettin' a companion."

Lady de Burgh wondered if Kate was right. Honoria had had that look of flowering and blossoming since the visit of the Don. Was he coming back? And did Honoria know?

There was a light in the little post-office window. Beyond it was a greyness and the sound of the sea. Behind the tower where it stood up the sky was a hazy pink, momentarily growing fainter. A young moon hung just above the tower, the twinkling point of a star within its crescent.

Lady de Burgh opened the half-door of the post-office and went in. The office proper was enclosed

by a screen of lattice-work. You transacted your business over the counter through an opening like that of a railway booking-office. She did not knock at the counter as the people on business usually did, but went round the screen and into the inner room with the assurance of one who is sure of her welcome. There had been no change in the affectionate relations between Lady de Burgh and the post-mistress, which had made some of her conservative neighbours shrug their shoulders and say : " Oh, those English ! Once they take up Irish notions there's no knowing where they'll stop."

She had wondered if Honoria knew anything of the changed relations between Sir Hugo and Maurice. She thought not. Maurice would keep his own counsel.

Honoria jumped up like a girl at sight of her, with an exclamation of pleasure, coming to meet her.

" I never heard you come in," she said. " I was writing a letter."

" You should close the door now the evenings grow dark, Honoria. You are not afraid of tramps ? You should have someone living with you."

" Is it me ? " asked Honoria. " As I've often said, your Ladyship, I'm old enough and ugly enough to take care of myself, although there's some "—she suddenly blushed vividly—" has no more sense than to say that I'm no such thing as old and ugly."

" Mr. Fitzmaurice ? " said Lady de Burgh with an interrogatory lift of her fine brows.

" The same foolish man," returned Honoria. " I was just writing to him. Sure he has me bothered.

I'm thinking there'll have to be a new post-mistress —by Easter, maybe."

"You've been very hard-hearted," Elizabeth de Burgh said softly. "How long is it since he came? I often wondered he should keep away."

"I wouldn't let him come back till I was sure of myself—and of him," said Honoria, blushing radiantly. "At last—he wouldn't take no for an answer, any longer."

CHAPTER XV

THE OLD FRIEND

The days of late autumn after Mary's home-coming were very sweet. It was Indian summer, and the woods had not yet lost their honey-coloured veils, although myriads of the dead leaves drifted underfoot and blew before a breath of wind. A little frost would turn the woods scarlet and then the first wind would strip the boughs bare. But as yet there was neither frost nor storm. A pale gold sun lay every day over the country, turning the bog pools inland to gold, lighting the rose-pink heather on the hills, lying on the calm sea like a benediction.

In Elizabeth de Burgh's heart there was the sweetness of reconciliation and new understanding with her beloved. To know all was with her to love the more. She pitied her man with a poignant mother-pity, because he had borne his trouble alone; and she examined her tender conscience to discover when and how she had done him the great wrong that he should be afraid of her, should not have trusted her from the beginning. The pity and the hurt were almost equally poignant. He had a new way with her very sweet and humble, as though she had much to forgive.

Mary coming home was quick to note the change.

"What have you done to Papa?" she asked. "He was becoming crusty. Now he is like what he used to be when he seemed without a care; only, I think I love this Papa better."

There had been a brief letter of thanks from Christopher for the hospitality of Castle Morrogh, written at Dublin, on his way through. Mary had not mentioned him once since she came home, an omission perturbing to her mother, who noticed that the girl did not fill her days with happy occupation as she had been used to. Mary was as sweet as ever, but she was listless. She sang no more to herself joyfully as she had been used to do. If she sang at all hers were sad songs. She was very silent. She started when she was spoken to. Her friends in the cottages missed her and complained. One did not hear her laughter as she romped with the dogs, and those faithful satellites of hers wore a disenchanted, an aggrieved air.

Bridget O'Connor, mending and making in her restored kingdom, and grumbling because Bawn had not written, put into words Lady de Burgh's secret fears.

"I don't know what's on Miss Mary," she said. "As I walked home from chapel o' Sunday Abbie Grady was complainin' that Miss Mary'd never called to comfort her for Sibbie an' Liz gone to America. She said true enough: 'Whin there was sorrow Miss Mary's face was always the first in the door, unless it was her Ladyship's.' An' the same way wid others. Ellen O'Brien wanted to know if Miss Mary knew the

childher'd had the whoopin' cough. 'Let you not be talkin', woman,' said I. 'You wouldn't be havin' Miss Mary whoopin' for all the world like a cacklin' hin, the same as your seven.' I shut up their ould chat; but all the same—there's somethin' wrong wid Miss Mary. 'Tis like as if she was to be in love. But sure it couldn't be.''

As she said it she cast a curious look from under her eyelids at Lady de Burgh, whose colour came quickly.

"Don't be foolish, Bridget," she said, more sternly than she was accustomed to speak. Afterwards, when she had left Bridget mending her Limerick lace flounce and nursing a grievance because the mistress who was so very gentle had been stern for once, her own painful doubts came back upon her.

Was Mary in love?—and with Christopher? The thought was so repellent to her that it affected her physically, like a nausea. She felt in herself the shrinkings, the repulsions of the maiden for the lover, even for the right lover if he be too ardent, but for the wrong lover something not to be borne.

She tried to keep Mary with her, to win her out of the isolation of her own thoughts. But the girl who had always sought her slipped away from her, even when Sir Hugo's business took him out for the greater part of the day and they could be together. Since the reconciliation Sir Hugo was newly exacting. He wanted all that he could have of his wife's company. Mary, coming back from her strange distances to everyday life, had laughed at her father.

"Go to your baby," she had said to her mother. "He is not happy out of your sight."

Lady de Burgh had to yield so much to this fond new insistence that Mary, when her father was in the house, must needs be shut out. She went for long rides by herself and long walks, to the delirious pleasure of the dogs, who had lost their playmate and were disturbed by this strange, aloof Mary.

In those days Elizabeth de Burgh prayed hard for her girl. Mary was in love, and not happily in love. Going into the girl's little oratory one day she found withered flowers and an extinguished lamp. It was symbolic of the disorder, the ill-ease, she conjectured in Mary's heart. The love that was troubling her girl had come between the little white soul and the holinesses and simplicities of life.

Into the quietness of the autumn days came sudden grief in the shape of a telegram from Dubois. The Vicomte, who had been ailing for some time and had not troubled people about it—it was part of his breeding never to give trouble—had slipped out of the world one night without any warning. He had been dead for some hours when Dubois, sleeping in the ante-room, had awakened to the disturbing silence. M. le Vicomte for some time had had trouble with his breathing.

Of course Sir Hugo made hasty preparations to go to Paris. While he gave orders his wife, from amid her tears, asked to go with him. She had a feeling that the faithful heart which she had never been able to reward as it deserved would be happier for her presence.

Sir Hugo, very stern and sad, flashed at her a gleam of relief. "I was wondering if I might ask you to come, Elizabeth," he said; "I dreaded going alone."

Then turning to her he hid his eyes on her shoulder for a moment, with the new entire dependence which she found so poignantly sweet.

Mary could stay. No use bringing Mary to that Paris death-bed. They would be only away for a few days, just to accompany the old friend to his last resting-place, within sound of the sea, on the wild Breton coast.

Maurice was already at the quiet Paris hotel, hidden away beyond a courtyard, when they arrived. He was looking very haggard and unlike the old Maurice of the slender grace and bright quick eyes. He was kneeling by the bedside when they came in. The room was typically French, comfortless according to the insular ideals, with its marble-topped console tables and gilt mirrors, the gilt clock and vases on the mantelpiece, comfortless chairs of blue satin with tarnished gilt backs. There was a deal of heavy drapery about the bed in the alcove, on which lay the quiet figure of the Vicomte, the sharpened face ivory against the bed-curtains, the thin hands folded over the Crucifix.

"Monsieur died as he had lived, a good son of the Church," Dubois had whispered. "He had many friends who did not think as he did. Monsieur was bon soldat et bon Catholique. C'est la même chose, n'est-ce pas, Madame?"

Under the Crucifix showed the Croix de Guerre

which M. de Luynes had won in 1870. The scarlet ribbon flared like a patch of blood.

Elizabeth de Burgh had brought some violets. Stooping over him she laid them beside the Crucifix hiding the scarlet ribbon. She could almost have thought the dead man smiled.

Maurice had stood up, and waited apart; red-eyed and miserable, his sleek hair ruffled like the coat of a sick dog. She noticed suddenly a heap of black at the bed-foot—Judy. She went and laid her hand on Judy's head, and the dog whined and shivered.

"She would not be dislodged," said Maurice, coming forward. "Dubois tried to take her away and she showed her teeth. After all, what harm does she do? And he loved her. She has always slept on his bed ever since that night five years ago."

Lady de Burgh took Maurice's two hands between her own.

"You poor boy," she said—"you poor, poor boy!"

He choked and turned away his head. Sir Hugo was kneeling on the prie-dieu beside the bed; he had buried his face in his hands. His shoulders shook. She looked from one poor man to the other. Then, holding Maurice's hand in her own, she drew him out of the room, into the salon, equally cold, gaudy, and unhomelike.

"My poor boy," she said, "tell me all about it." Then he broke into sobbing. They sat side by side on the ridiculous fauteuil with its squab and buttoned upholstery of dark-blue satin while she comforted him. She was glad when her husband joined them and was

kind to Maurice in a shy unhappy way, very unlike Sir Hugo as Maurice had known and feared him.

The hotel-keeper was very anxious for the removal of the body. Plainly he thought it inconsiderate of Monsieur to have died in his hotel. Lady de Burgh thought with a whimsical sadness that the Vicomte would have been grieved if he could have known that his dying had incommoded the good man. So the coffin was removed under cover of the night, the fact of the death being known only to the proprietor and staff of the Hôtel de L'Étoile—and the party of three mourners went down to pay the old friend the last sorrowful duty at St. Kerval.

They returned by way of Paris, where they had to recover Judy. Dubois lifted his hands while he described the inconvenience the dog had caused him. She was inconsolable. She had refused food. Dubois, waiting for the engagement Dr. Adolph Meunier had promised him, had been at his wit's end what to do with the dog. She had given him the slip when he took her out and had returned to the Rue L'Étoile, where her mournful howling at the closed gate had caused M. Charpentier *un désespoir*.

There was some little business to be done. The Vicomte's will had to be read. He had appointed Lady de Burgh his executrix. Apparently for some time he had been living on a small annuity. There were a few thousand francs for Maurice—and there were the snuff-boxes. The Vicomte had been a collector of snuff-boxes. The collection had value. Maurice was to select from it one or two which took his fancy. The remainder went to Lady de Burgh

to be disposed of as she thought fit. The Château de St. Kerval to be Lady de Burgh's, with remainder to Mary. It was a grey sad old place, rather out of repair, profoundly melancholy as they had seen it in the winter rains and storms. His sword and a few bibelots to Sir Hugo. The wines at the Château and some books to the Curé of St. Kerval. All else to Lady de Burgh.

She was rather overwhelmed that he had given her so much. Maurice should have had what there was left, since, plainly, the money the Vicomte had given to her husband had reduced him to living on that painfully small annuity. The Château was so out of the world and so forbidding a residence—she had not seen it in summer when the courtyard was full of flowers and the old grey many-turreted house warm in the sun—that it must be a white elephant. They left the picturesque Breton couple who were in charge to inhabit the house and keep it from rotting to pieces. The snuff-boxes and the other bibelots were packed up: and they went home.

They parted from Maurice in London. He was going back to finish the Oxford Term. His plans for the future were nebulous. He looked for the present too full of grief to make any plans, and he wanted time to think.

He saw them off from Euston by the Irish mail one foggy November morning. He was going up to Oxford by a midday train. He stood bare-headed by the carriage door while they waited, and remained bareheaded as their train moved away. He had learnt almost exaggerated good manners, from the

insular point of view, by long association with that finest of fine gentlemen, the Vicomte.

"You were right about Maurice," Sir Hugo said, as they left the station behind. "The boy is a gentleman. Good blood shows."

She took it as an amende. Without anything being said she knew that the old friendly relations had been re-established between her husband and Maurice. The common grief for the dead friend had brought them together once more. Sir Hugo's manner to Maurice in those last sad days had been gentle, almost affectionate, with a certain humility about it which his wife had understood, while it left Maurice puzzled and shyly grateful.

"We shall make up to the lad, Elizabeth," he went on. "De Luynes said that the money was not to be repaid. He had always meant it for you. But he would have dealt more generously with Maurice —if—if—it had been in his power to do it. I have been thinking of what you said about the American and Castle Morrogh. He may have the place for his three years. Do you think we might spend some time next summer at the Château and save money? We could lead the simple life. I am sure it is a jolly place in summer."

"He would have liked us to," said Lady de Burgh as though that settled it, and stroked Judy's coat where the dog lay by her side, whimpering and shivering.

Her heart lifted towards the work they had to do together. Even yet she was not aware of his liabilities, of how many creditors he had beside the

Vicomte, who had so generously left them but a debt of honour. A few years earlier a seam of coal had been found on an outlying portion of the estate, and Sir Hugo had gone to great expense to work it. After all it had been abandoned. The seam had proved a thin one or the money had given out, or something. She wondered if all those liabilities had been paid.

She glanced across at her husband. In the masculine way he had settled himself in his corner-seat and closed his eyes. She had noticed how men sleep on a railway journey as easily as a dog, while women read or knit or stare out of window, placidly awake. He looked tired, and the newspaper he had opened had slid from his knee to the ground.

Poor Hugo! It had been a trying time. The grief and the long journeys, and all the sorrowful painful things!

While she watched he nodded asleep. With the relaxation of the lines of his face he looked more than his age. The alert soldierly look had gone. He looked weary and old. Watching him she had a constriction of the heart, as though someone had pressed it lightly within a hand.

The carriage was at the station, but no Mary as she had hoped. It was dark when they arrived at Breagh, and Lady de Burgh, looking up and down the platform for the beloved face, felt a blank sense of disappointment. Perhaps the carriage was a little late—it often was—or the train a little early.

Ah, there was Phelim, the tall young footman who was Bawn's first cousin, coming out of the darkness into the windy light of the station lamp. Phelim

helped her to alight and gathered the rugs and the various small impedimenta while Sir Hugo went in search of Tom, the one porter, whose appearances were apt to be erratic.

She had a queer sinking of the heart because Mary had not come.

"I hope everything is all right, Phelim," she said, patting Judy, who was pushing up against her dress as though for comfort and protection. She seemed to be the one person able to reach the suffering spirit in poor Judy.

"Everything is quite all right, m'lady," Phelim said cheerfully. "Miss Mary was coming, but she thought she'd crowd you and the master. Besides, Sir Christopher's here. He came last night, quite unexpected, I believe."

Elizabeth de Burgh's heart sank like lead. Then she was suddenly angry. It was insolent of Christopher to return when he chose without consulting them. How many hours had he been alone with Mary? That was the thought which pricked her.

CHAPTER XVI

FOR MARY

Mary ran out before the carriage door could be opened and hugged her mother as though they had been parted for months instead of days.

"You poor darling!" she said, "you are as cold as a stone. We are just waiting tea for you. And poor Papa! How tired you must be coming through without stopping! And is it Judy?—oh, poor Judy!"

There was a new vitality and warmth in Mary which her mother did not need to ask the source of. She was tired and cold and wretched. It was too bad to come home, to find Christopher. Mary had picked up Judy—Maryishly—and was carrying her up the steps and into the hall, exclaiming that Judy was very thin and small. Christopher was coming out to meet them, taking from her the things she was carrying, as though he were already one of the family. Oh, it was bitter to come home to Christopher.

Mary put down Judy on the hearthrug and wheeled a big chair for her mother close to the fire. The other dogs were standing in a circle, wagging their tails and barking, now and again leaving off to sniff

at Judy, only to be pushed away by their young mistress, because Judy was too sick and sorry to have anything to say to them, even if they were friendly.

Christopher was on his best behaviour, and his desire evidently was to propitiate Lady de Burgh. The most generous of women, she was not to be propitiated by Christopher. Sitting before the roaring fire, with Judy whimpering and pressing against her skirt, assiduously waited upon by Mary and Christopher, but not too assiduously by Christopher, who could be well-mannered if he chose, she felt a cold sinking at her heart. She was weary, and she felt that she was beaten. They were all against her. Mary would marry Christopher with her father's consent and be lost to her mother. Anyone watching Mary's adoring ways with her mother would have said such a thing was impossible. The tired and disappointed woman looked down the vista of the years. She saw Mary as Christopher's possession, living in a world with which she had little sympathy, a world of worldlings seeking pleasure and power, running after wealth, however made, since it was the open sesame to these things—a hard, glittering, selfish, mad, bad world.

Her little Mary—her one ewe lamb, who had lived in such innocency and love, fed upon ideals, cradled in the love of God and humanity! She could have cried out against the vision of Mary in that world. Surely Mary would be Mary even in Christopher's world — only — she was hurt to the heart that Mary could have chosen Christopher, that Mary—

and her father—would not see Christopher with her eyes.

Salt bitter tears came and could hardly be kept back. Christopher's presence, his personality, offended her. She said to herself that he had coarsened even in his short absence. He was too ruddy—too fleshy already. His eyes were too large; his teeth too white; he was too big; he was all exaggerations. She saw him as he would be in the years to come—dominant, overbearing, and—Mary's husband, the father of Mary's children. Oh, it was too much! Heaven had forgotten her. Her saints had forsaken her.

After the cup of tea, which afforded her no refreshment, she went upstairs to her own room. Sir Hugo and Mary had urged her tenderly to lie down for the two hours before the dressing-bell. She obeyed them, but she did not feel that she was going to rest. Nevertheless she allowed Mary to take off her shoes with tender hands, to lay away her outdoor garments, to put on her dressing-gown and tuck her comfortably in the blankets. But she only made a feint of resting. She lay with closed eyes, the tears heavy and cold within them.

Hardly had Mary left her before she got out of bed, turned up the lights, and sat down in the deep chintz-covered easy-chair facing the bright fire. She sat crouched a little over the fire as though she were cold—and old, for she had sunk down in the chair, as though her stateliness was in ruins.

Presently she was aware of a dog sniffing at the door. She opened it, and Judy came in, groping in

a half-blind way, and laid her head on her mistress's knees. Judy had chosen the next best to the friend she had lost after seeming to hesitate a while between Lady de Burgh and Maurice.

"You poor thing!" said Elizabeth de Burgh, looking in Judy's eyes, and the tears came with a sense of their common loss. How the Vicomte would have understood without being told! She had always known that his fastidiousness had been offended by Christopher. He had been glacial in his manner, but with so fine a courtesy that Christopher had not known the coldness was only for him.

There came a tap at the door, and before she could bid enter, Bridget came in.

She saw the tears which her mistress had not had time to conceal, and came over to her with a fierce tenderness.

"Sure, God help you, the cold's in your heart!" she said. "Wait now till I build up your fire. An' I'll make you a nice fresh cup o' tea. Maybe you'd be likin' a bath after. The water's fine and hot."

"No tea, Bridget, thank you, I've had tea. But I should like a bath before I dress. It need not be for a long time yet."

"You're perished," said Bridget, touching the slender listless hands, "and your feet as cold as a stone, I'm thinkin'. Sure 'twas too much for you. Old friends are best, and the world's a cold place when them is gone from it you could lean on, that was young wid you. Give me them that you can say 'Don't you remember?' to. New friends are well enough, but you can't say that to them."

She was pulling off Lady de Burgh's stockings, taking the finely arched delicate feet into her lap, as she sat on the fender-stool, chafing them between her two hands.

"You were surprised, maybe," she said, glancing at Lady de Burgh's face and then down again at the slender feet, "to find Sir Christopher stayin' when you came back. I thought he'd gone for good."

"So did I," said Lady de Burgh wearily.

"You don't like him, alanna?" said the nurse, in a soft low voice. "You don't like him. Sure 'tis not forgettin' my place I am talkin' to you like this! Isn't Miss Mary like my own child? Didn't I give her my child's milk when you were too sick to do it, an' didn't you love me the better and not hate me as many a lady hates her child's foster-mother? An' doesn't my child love Miss Mary better than herself? Sure, I couldn't be forgettin' my place, could I?"

Lady de Burgh bent down and kissed Bridget's weather-beaten face. She was, as Bridget said—"that humble, for all she was so proud."

Bridget's face lit up with emotion and delight. "There," she said, "there isn't a lady like you within the four seas of Ireland, for all you're English! Sure, haven't you the heart for Ireland?"

Lady de Burgh laughed between her tears.

"When an English man or woman falls in love with your Granuaile, Bridget," she said, "there's no cure for it but death."

"Listen now, my Lady," said Bridget, still chafing Lady de Burgh's feet, and seeming oddly to draw

the coldness from her heart as she did it, "I wouldn't be frettin'. Sure, Miss Mary's your own daughter. Her fancy may go astray for a while. 'Tis a very quare thing that often the innocentest will be taken that way for a man that's not good—or good for them. Often I've seen it and known it, an' I misdoubt but when the crathur's givin' in to him most there's somethin' keeps holdin' her away from him. In her heart of hearts Miss Mary knows, though she won't listen to Them that's whisperin' at her ear. But she'll listen! she'll listen! Didn't ye bring her up to be good and nothin' but good? Isn't she the child of your prayers? I don't think meself that God would be forgettin' you like that."

The words were like balm to the weary heart. A great restfulness seemed to take possession of Elizabeth de Burgh and envelop her. She rested her heart on that assurance as on a bed.

"Another thing," went on Bridget, "I wouldn't be crossin' her, nor looking black at him. Many a match was made because people had no more sense than to set themselves agin it. The better and kinder a girl is the more she'll stand by a man because black looks are turned on him. It wouldn't be in you to pretend what you didn't feel, but, all the same, I wouldn't be agin her, acushla, for it'll only break her heart, while it'll make her stick to him the faster. Give her time an' she'll see for herself."

The homely wisdom of it! Elizabeth de Burgh was very glad Bridget had spoken.

"Thank you, Bridget," she said. "I think you are very sensible. I will try to do as you suggest."

In her heart she was crying out upon the assumption that Mary's will could be against hers—for any length of time—that *her* happiness would not count with her girl as much as her own. She began to see things in a new light. Mary was threatened by a danger which she must avert, by cunning if need be. It was against her nature to be cunning; but she could wrench her nature for Mary. She could be furtive and secretive like a little female animal defending its young—for Mary, if need be. And behind her would be the invisible forces of Heaven.

She stood up to her full height with a bracing of the moral sinews.

"I shall have my bath now, Bridget," she said, "and I will dress for dinner afterwards. You will help me to dress? You are going to be my maid now, you know. But—how selfish I am!—you have heard from Bawn, of course?"

"Not yet, my Lady. I was thinkin' maybe you'd write a line to that Mother Abbess for me. 'Tis ten days since she went an' I haven't had a word. Of course I know she's safe. Weren't the nuns to meet her? Sure, what could happen to her?"

"She should have written," Lady de Burgh said. "But I daresay she will take a little while to settle into the new life. I shall write to Dame Ethelburga at once and ask if she has news."

She dressed, helped by Bridget, who animadverted all the time upon the shortcomings of the departed lady's maid and ladies' maids in general. She certainly was very competent, and Lady de Burgh did not seem likely to suffer for her economy in giving

up a very expensive and exacting servant. Bridget dressed her mistress's hair as though she loved it. Years ago she had learnt from a French maid the duties of the calling, so that Angélique could be off duty without being missed; and she had not forgotten that acquired learning.

She dressed her lady's hair high, piling the fine soft masses of dead-leaf colour, powdered with grey, and confining them within a gold fillet, a high comb set with pearls at the back. The floating filmy black which Lady de Burgh now always wore had no relief but the pearl necklace that streaked the black with drops of glimmering white.

Elizabeth de Burgh never thought of her looks. With a vivid sense of beauty she had seldom thought upon her own: and the noble stateliness of her figure, as she saw it in a staircase mirror, was too familiar a thing to interest her.

She was saying to herself as she went down, fingering her pearls, that she must be patient and cunning for Mary's sake; she must be wary lest hostility to Christopher should force Mary's generous sympathies towards him. She must learn to control her eyes, her voice—for Mary. But how far could she go? She could not be more than colourless. She could not pretend to *like* Christopher—that would be too much. But she could love Mary as much as she would and guard her eyes and her voice from betraying displeasure. It was late for her proud honest nature to put itself to school in this way, to learn to deceive, but it must be done—for Mary.

She had need of her courage and resolution sooner

than she anticipated. As she went down the stairs the clock in the hall struck seven—the old lacquer clock which was supposed to strike twenty-five when any member of the family was going to die. She could remember the time when, new-come to Castle Morrogh, she had been terrified at a husky creaking in the clock after it had passed the twelfth stroke.

There was no clicking of balls in the billiard-room. They were not there. As she passed the door of her husband's room she heard him speak and someone answer in peasant speech. Sir Hugo was always interviewing someone or other who wanted troublesome affairs smoothed out. He was a good landlord and a good neighbour to the poor; and many had cause to bless him.

The drawing-room door was slightly ajar, showing a thin line of light. She opened it and went in, passing round the screen which kept off the draught from the hall-door, that stood open nearly all the year.

The drawing-room was a long stately room, and the lamps were shaded. She was half-way up its length before she was aware of Mary, her face raised to Christopher's. So absorbed were they in each other that they had not heard her come.

Christopher was looking down into Mary's eyes. She wore a fascinated air. Lady de Burgh had come in the midst of a love-scene.

She saw Christopher bend his head. In another second Mary would have been in his arms. The mother could not endure it. She had not schooled herself to that.

She spoke and they started apart. Mary was pale. She looked as though she would run into a mousehole from her mother's eyes.

"Mamma!" she said guiltily; and flushed deeply. "I thought you were resting. You——"

Christopher advanced and set a chair for Lady de Burgh. His manners, like everything else, were exaggerated.

"You see how it is with us," he said. "Mary has drawn me back. I meant to speak to-night to you and her father, Cousin Elizabeth. I think Mary cares for me and I shall try to be very good to her."

It was quite evident that Mary cared. The pallor had passed and she was like a rose. Sir Hugo came in, saying that the hall-door should be kept shut now that it was approaching mid-winter, that the house was like an ice-berg.

He stopped short and stared at the little group about the fireplace, with a sense of something unusual. Christopher put out his hand.

"I hope you don't object to me, sir, I'll do my best. You must have known what brought me back."

Sir Hugo looked from him to Mary. His face flushed. His wife's fine ears caught the faint sigh as of an immense relief.

"My dear Christopher, I am very glad," he said.

CHAPTER XVII

BAD TIDINGS

CHRISTOPHER, called away by his election-agent, did not long enjoy the delights of being newly engaged. He would come back as soon as he could. Meanwhile the wedding was fixed for January. Christopher was an eager lover and could not be induced to put it off till after his election.

"Mary will canvass for me," he said. "She will look ripping wearing the Conservative colours. No one can resist her. She will be worth a great many votes to me."

"She must not give up 'Wearin' the Green,'" said Lady de Burgh, in a faint voice, with a smile that hurt her mouth.

"Oh, Mary is going to make a very good Englishwoman," said Christopher, in what Sir Hugo called his John Bullish way. Since his engagement the way was more pronounced, more aggressive than it used to be. "For the matter of that, Cousin Elizabeth and *belle mère*," he went on, "you are an Englishwoman yourself. Mary will only be going back to her own people."

Short as the time was before Christopher's departure

he managed within it to annoy Sir Hugo nearly as much as he fretted Lady de Burgh.

"He rubs you up the wrong way," Sir Hugo complained, talking from his dressing-room to his wife in her bedroom with the pauses between proper to lathering and shaving. "And I don't like his love-making—when it's to my daughter. All very well for a housemaid, perhaps. I'm glad he's going."

A little later Sir Hugo said that if he wasn't a poor man Christopher should not have his daughter.

Christopher had certainly deteriorated. He seemed to require a good many brandies-and-sodas during the course of the day. And—his love-making was vulgar—there was not a doubt about it. It was made in and out of season. Mary began to look appeals and excuses to her mother when Christopher was rather outrageous. It was a good thing his electioneering agent had found his presence indispensable.

When Christopher was gone the atmosphere of a quiet loftiness came back to the house. It was as though worldliness had been cast out. Lady de Burgh thought within herself with repugnance that Christopher made a rough wooer. Smoothing back Mary's rippled, copper-coloured hair she thought distastefully that the smoothly-shining head was often ruffled by Christopher's caresses. She put away from her mind the disagreeable fact that Christopher would be coming back again, worse still that January 23, the day fixed for Mary's wedding, was but two

months away. She tried to be happy for the present, having Mary to herself, with no Christopher to make incessant masterful demands upon her time.

Mary had said one day in her mother's presence that Christopher did not even give her time to say her prayers ; and Christopher had answered that she said too many prayers, and that all *his* prayers were for her shrine.

Sir Hugo had looked up from his newspaper to remark, with a gruff pretence of its being only a jest, that Mary must resist Christopher's exactions in time, else she'd live to be sorry for it.

Because she disliked and distrusted Christopher Lady de Burgh took what he had said with a seriousness which she knew to be exaggerated. Men said such things. She would have smiled if Sir Hugo had said the like. But while she argued with herself against her own narrow injustice, she could not push away from her the feeling that Christopher would wage war against the spiritual life of her girl. Christopher troubled neither church nor chapel, as he said himself, and he had said many things that pained and perplexed Elizabeth de Burgh, watching with a malicious pleasure their effect upon her.

She set herself to pray against the marriage, that if God saw well it should not take place.

But, things went on automatically towards it. Christopher's proposed settlements on his bride were very generous. The generosity mollified Sir Hugo now that Christopher was no longer there to rub

him up the wrong way. He wrote that Pixies, his house near Dorking, was having some necessary refurbishing for the bride; Mary was to select her own wall-papers and curtains and chair-covers. Big books of patterns from London shops began to arrive.

"I am moving my mother into the Dower House," wrote Christopher characteristically. "She doesn't like it, but she has had a long run here and can't complain. The jewels are being re-set for you. You remember the emeralds my mother wore sometimes. They are being put into a lighter setting. I long to see them on your little white neck."

Other things were to await Mary's presence. The horses—"You can bring Colleen if you specially wish, but she's so old she's only fit for the knacker's yard or the kennels. But bring anything you like except that brute Judy. I won't have Judy at any price."

Mary reading her love-letter—Christopher wrote every day—glanced across at her mother with an appeal, a deprecation as though the contents of the letter were apparent.

There was so much understood, so many things unsaid, between them now who had been used to share every thought and experience. Lady de Burgh wondered what Christopher had been writing to displease Mary, but asked nothing.

Mary finished her letter, and looked up, with an appearance of lightness, to say:

"Christopher says that Colleen will be welcome at Pixies if I like to bring her, but perhaps she is too

old for exile. Also he says I am not to bring Judy because she disliked him—as though *you* would let Judy go."

Lady de Burgh repressed a sharp irritation. It was not the least intolerable of Christopher's assumptions that Mary had all the rights. Subtly Lady de Burgh felt that Christopher pushed her aside as an old woman. He would have said that the young should possess the earth.

"Colleen will be very dear to us for your sake, darling," she said sweetly. "I daresay Christopher is right and she is too old for expatriation. I shall drive her in the pony carriage sometimes to keep her feet right. As for Judy—well, I really believe it would break Judy's heart to be parted from me."

Judy, lying on a fold of her skirt, sighed and looked up with mournful affection before composing herself to sleep again. Judy was very sad. She had what Bridget O'Connor called "terrible wirrasthrue ways wid her"; she was old beyond her years. She had conceived an unaccountable antipathy for Christopher, and had interfered with his rather violent love-making in a manner which he very naturally resented. He had suggested the shooting of Judy, and had laughed at Mary's horror at the suggestion, making it a second time to Lady de Burgh, who had looked at him with something like disgust.

He was very unimaginative: and he would have been surprised if he could have guessed how Lady de Burgh, sometimes, whispered in Judy's flapping ears her thoughts of himself.

Christopher had certainly deteriorated, or they were all in the condition which, in a fractious baby, the nurse describes as " touchy." Many women had been in love with Christopher, with his good looks, his air of well-being, his masculine forcefulness. Perhaps it was the memory of those triumphs which gave him his complacency. Many men found him a very good fellow. If he was rich he could be generous when he chose. He had been a very good son, people said, to a worldly and selfish mother. Much prosperity was writ large on him but had not wholly spoilt him. And he had seen service as a soldier and been decorated, which was in his favour.

These were things Sir Hugo had insisted on almost piteously—calling out to his wife through their door of communication that Christopher was a better fellow than anyone could have hoped, seeing what his mother was, seeing how he sometimes misrepresented himself.

Still Christopher offended with the best will in the world. They were certainly touchy. His offerings were magnificent. The registered post brought jewels such as Mary had never dreamt of possessing, with all manner of other things. Finally there was a message. He was coming back and he could not spare Mary to get her trousseau. He supposed she must have a wedding-dress, but it was no use getting a lot of things. Did Dublin produce anything fit to wear ? They could run over to Paris for a week after the Day—he could not be spared now for the long honeymoon they would have later. She could have as many " creations " as she liked—he would

not grumble—but he would superintend her fittings. Did she not know that now-a-days men always superintended their wives' fittings ?

Mary did not read the latter part of the letter aloud. But Sir Hugo was certainly touchy over the trousseau question.

" Does he think we can't dress our girl ? " he asked : and immediately drew a cheque for a hundred pounds, bidding his wife take Mary up to Dublin and provide her with garments suitable to a young lady in her circumstances.

One of those days there came grief and consternation. There had been no letter from Bawn since she left ; no word of her since that post-card from Holyhead. Bridget had worried for many days over the non-arrival of a letter. Lady de Burgh had pointed out to her, over and over, that it took some time to get to Spain and that the postal arrangements were not always reliable : but Bridget grew more restive as the days passed, bringing no letter.

One morning there was a letter from Dame Ethelburga.

" We have heard from our Sisters who arrived at Barcelona the 5th November. They tell us they could find no trace of your protégée at Euston. Of course she has come back to you since you wrote. Will you let me know why she did not come ? I am afraid it will greatly inconvenience the Zuccheros."

The nun's letter had a trace of offence. When Lady de Burgh had read it she laid it down on the table and stared at it in stupefaction. Where *was* Bawn. " My God, where ? " she said aloud.

Sir Hugo was out hunting and would not be back for several hours. Bridget was packing the trunks for her ladies. They were going up to Dublin by an early train the next day for the purchase of the trousseau. She could hear Mary playing her plaintive Irish music in the distance. She was frightened. How was she going to tell Bridget? And what steps ought to be taken about this business? The emergency was too big for her. She did not know how to handle it. Oh, if Hugo were only back! He would hardly be home before evening.

How was she to tell Bridget? Bridget had been in a fractious mood when she set about the packing. She did not like her Miss Mary's marriage. She had detested Lady Damer and she was not more well-disposed towards the lady's son. "Let her marry that gentleman," she had said, "an' she's our Miss Mary no more. Isn't there many a fine Irish gentleman like her Papa she could have for a husband?"

How was she to tell Bridget? Her heart fluttered with terror as she heard the nurse go along the corridor singing in a cracked voice. She passed by the door—on her way downstairs. Would she return and find her mistress still incapable of help, of counsel? All that morning Bridget had been coming in and out on one business or another, to fetch something to be packed, asking if this or that would be required. She was a privileged person. Knowing her beloved mistress close at hand in her bedroom, she would come in to impart a bit of news, an observation—she was very caustic about the other servants—and go out again.

Was that Bridget's foot returning? A sudden cowardice seized the woman who had never before lacked courage in any crisis of her life.

The step passed on. Bridget would be back again as soon as the mood seized her. The last time she had put in her head it had been so say:

"Gardeners' is the idlest business I know. If you was to be paid for lanin' on your spade an' havin' a pull at th' ould pipe, they'd earn great wages."

But the caustic comments were only a mockery of what they had been. They had lost snap, as an American would say. Caustic comments, spoken thickly because of a lump in the throat and a threatening of tears, somehow fail of their effect.

Who was she to go to for advice? The parish priest? It was some distance to his house and she might not find him at home. Suddenly a thought came to her—Honoria. She had not seen her for some time. Honoria was wise and common-sensible, and there was no fear with her of Bawn's disappearance becoming a country tale. Honoria was certain to be at home at this hour. It was only the very slack hours which found her absent from her post.

Before Bridget could come back again Lady de Burgh had slipped out of the house, going quietly along the corridor, past the nurseries, where Bridget was packing and talking to herself. The drawing-room door was slightly ajar. Mary was at the piano. She was singing a drawing-room song—one of a bundle Christopher had sent her. They were pseudo-Oriental love-songs, smelling of patchouli the mother

thought. Mary was acquiring them obediently, laying aside the dew-wet fragrant things she loved, because Christopher preferred these highly-spiced ditties.

Honoria came to meet her visitor with outstretched hands. The casual observer might have been surprised at the appearance of warm friendship between the great lady and the village post-mistress, if they had not known the lady and the post-mistress.

"It is good for sore eyes to see your Ladyship," said Honoria. "You never came to tell me the great news about Miss Mary. I was looking for you every day."

Lady de Burgh looked at Honoria, a direct honest gaze.

"There!" said Honoria, "you don't like to part with her. Why would you? Sure, we all grudge her to an English husband. Not that I'm saying a word against the *good* English. Aren't you one yourself? Sure, they couldn't be bettered. But we'd come to think of Miss Mary as Ireland's. The people will be grudging her to any Englishman."

She looked sharply at Lady de Burgh.

"You're in trouble," she said, "and you've come to tell me. Come in. I'll put the kettle on to boil and make you a cup of tea, and I'll lock the door so they won't be bothering me for a stamp while we talk. No matter what trouble you're in tea's comforting."

Lady de Burgh did not protest against the tea nor Honoria's dereliction of duty. She went into the inner room of the post-office, where a bright fire

of wood and turf burned. She sat down in the basket chair. Judy, who followed her always now, stretched out at her feet. She began her tale while Honoria stood by the mantelpiece and listened, one slender foot, with a fine arched instep, resting on the bead-worked fender-stool.

CHAPTER XVIII

FRIENDS IN COUNCIL

Honoria listened to the story, attentively, to the end. The old-fashioned convex mirror leaning down represented a small delicately minute Honoria in its shining depths. Lady de Burgh watching her where she stood, her face partly turned away, was struck, despite her preoccupation, by Honoria's splendour. She was so big and soft and capable-looking—so framed for wifehood and motherhood. It would have been a thousand pities if the fairy-tale Don had not come along to rescue Honoria from the Sleeping-Beauty Palace of Mount Lambert Post Office. She was absurdly out of place selling stamps, one at a time, and making up the attenuated mail bag which went out of Mount Lambert every evening.

"It looks bad enough," she said, when Lady de Burgh had finished. "The poor child! I'm not for minding all the queer stories that are going round about girls being kidnapped. A good modest girl with her wits about her ought to be safe enough from that. Bawn is no fool, and the nuns

gave her a good education, too good, some people would think. You don't think she'd go of her own accord ? "

Honoria turned the full splendour of her blue eyes on Lady de Burgh. Intense blue eyes under the corn-coloured hair, the skin golden as Ceres' daughter—Lady de Burgh blinked before that sudden gaze. Honoria's eyes were as blue as the bog pools when they reflected the sky of sapphire that hung above them sometimes of a winter afternoon.

" Poor Bawn ! " Lady de Burgh spoke with a little indignation. She resented Honoria's suggestion. " The poor child ! She was far too good to go with a stranger. Oh, but you mean some woman might have got hold of her. I had warned Bawn not to make friends with strangers, telling her something of the dangers. You don't want to make those children think that all the world is trying to entrap them."

" I thought—you don't think Bawn could have gone with anyone she knew ? "

Again the blue glance upon Lady de Burgh's fair unconscious face, suddenly directed and as suddenly withdrawn.

" Bawn's never been out of the place. She could not have known anyone."

The kettle boiled over in the kitchen.

" To be sure not," said Honoria. " What could I have been thinking of ? Wait now till I wet the tea. I've got a bit of a headache this morning. A cup of tea will clear it, maybe."

She disappeared and came back in a few moments with a tray in her hand containing a little set of delicate egg-shell china, her grandmother's china, kept for great occasions. Another excursion brought the tea-pot and a plate of thinly-cut home-made bread and butter.

The tea—Honoria paid three and six a pound for it as her grandmother had done, dealing with a famous London house—was delicious. There was a little jug of Daisy's cream—Daisy was the cow, part Jersey, who roamed over the dunes, picking sweet bits of grass here and there amid the arid tufts. There was white loaf sugar—and a little glass dish of honey.

"Well?" asked Lady de Burgh, enjoying the tea despite her troubled mind. "What counsel?"

"I'm afraid you'll have to go to the police, my Lady. There's nothing else for it. I'd tell Sir Hugo if I were you. He'll know how to set about it. I wish Maurice could be of some use; but the Term doesn't end till the 8th December. After that, he'll be in London. If he was any use then there's nothing he wouldn't love to do for your Ladyship. You'll have to tell the mother."

"Bridget will take it badly."

"You'll have to let her know. I'd tell her for you if I could. She mustn't make a hullabaloo and set the place talking about the child. You'll have to impress it on her that she's to keep a stiff upper lip. Once she took it in that it was for Bawn's

sake, to keep the tongue of scandal from her, she'd do it."

"No one would be wicked enough . . ." Lady de Burgh began.

"They might," said Honoria drily. "Sure, what else have they got to talk about but the neighbours? They're good-hearted, but it's human nature to talk. You'll have another cup of tea?"

Lady de Burgh accepted another cup of tea.

"Thank you, Honoria," she said. "I think you've given me wise advice. I shall tell my husband, and he will know what to do. And I'll break it to poor Bridget. I think she will rise to it when she knows it is for Bawn. It will be easier, as she doesn't mix much with the other servants. I shall get it over at once."

She stood up to go, and Judy also stood up and uttered a shrill bark, impatient to be off. There were moments, such as the moment of starting for a walk, when Judy forgot that she was a bereaved dog.

"Mary and I are going up to Dublin to-morrow about her clothes," she said, with a weary sound in her voice. "It makes things sadder, this trouble about Bawn. I do hope we shall be able to clear up the mystery."

"I hope so, indeed."

The most surprising change came over Honoria's face. The rich colour flooded it. Something shy and girlish came to its mature beauty.

"I'm afraid you won't find me here, my Lady,

when you come back," she said. "I've offered my resignation and it's been accepted."

"Honoria!"

"I'm going to London to be married. I've got to put in a few weeks of residence there. He wouldn't wait till Easter. He's in London this minute."

"I am very glad—for you, Honoria—very sad for myself. The place will not be the same without you—and Mary."

"We'll be coming back. He's all for buying some old place and restoring it. If it was to be an old Fitzmaurice place so much the better."

"Castle Morrogh once belonged to the Fitzmaurices."

"We wouldn't be for turning you out," she laughed. "He'll have to be content with less than Castle Morrogh."

Lady de Burgh gazed, half-enviously, at Honoria.

"You look very happy," she said.

"Why shouldn't I, and the man so fond of me? He thinks the sun and the moon shine out of me. He's the simplest creature alive. I don't know why I kept him waiting."

"He is very charming, your Don. You've got over the feeling then that his terrible tragedy came between you, that you were afraid of that past?"

"I've come to love him for his faithfulness. I thought he couldn't give me enough, having given them so much. I was wrong. I wouldn't let him

forget them if I could. I'm not going to shut them out. I don't think she'll mind me comforting him. She was only a child, not so much bigger than those black-eyed darlings."

"I shall never come up to the post-office again," Lady de Burgh said, her sad eyes wandering about the white-washed room with its air of a curious refinement, imparted by the old furniture, which the Roches had preserved jealously through their years of being down in the world.

"You will. You're not going to set up a ghost in it. We'll be back. Sure, I couldn't be happy out of it, and isn't it his dream? He'll be better away too from the place where *that* happened. We're going to travel a bit before we settle down. We might buy Caltragh — who knows — and restore it. He was saying something about it in a letter."

"It would take a fortune to restore Caltragh."

"So it would. We went to see it when he was here and he talked of buying it."

"And Maurice?"

She asked the question wistfully. It was in her mind that when Mary was married Maurice might come again and stay with them. Of course, life could never be again as it had been—with Mary all her own, with the Vicomte and Maurice coming two or three times a year. She would be very good to Maurice if he would come. After all, it was only the poison Caroline Damer had dropped into her hus-

band's ear that had made him cold-shoulder poor Maurice.

"Maurice leaves Oxford after this Term. It is a pity in some ways, but—Antonio wants him to take his place in the vineyards. By and by he will give him a partnership. If the Vicomte were here, God rest his soul, he would say it was a chance Maurice should not refuse."

She did not say that the offer had been made to Maurice before the Vicomte's death, that it had not been accepted till Maurice had heard of Mary's engagement, when he had written at once to his future brother-in-law.

"He goes to Monterey immediately after Christmas, waiting only for our wedding."

"It seems as though everyone was going at once," said Lady de Burgh, with her look of resigned sadness. "Shall I see you again, Honoria?"

"I'm afraid I shall be gone before you come back. I'll run in some time to-day to say good-bye to Miss Mary."

"And to give me a London address. I am glad, of course, for you and Maurice—but it is very sad for me."

"I'll be coming back. Don't you know, your Ladyship, I couldn't stay out of it any more than yourself? For all I know he may have bought Caltragh already. The way with him is that it is no sooner said than done. You wouldn't believe the things he's given me."

She made a step or two to an old bureau by the wall, unlocked it, and took out a number of shabby

jewel-cases which stood within the flap. She opened one after another on the table and flashed the contents into Lady de Burgh's eyes. There were necklaces, tiaras, bracelets, brooches—in almost barbaric splendour. There was a string of pearls as beautiful as Lady de Burgh's own. A pair of earrings, pink pearls, pear-shaped, were worth a small fortune. There was a ring, of a large black pearl surrounded by diamonds.

"Honoria!" said Lady de Burgh, with a little gasp. "What a lover! These things have immense value. I wonder if they ought to be here—in this little place!"

"They're safe enough," said Honoria calmly. "But I'd rather not travel with them. So I'm sending them by registered post back to him. He's in London, and the impatientest man you ever knew for me to be there. If I kept him too long he'd be over to take me, though I told him I wouldn't have the neighbours talking. He thinks someone will run away with me on the journey. Me! At my age!"

"Honoria!" said Lady de Burgh solemnly, "I don't know what age you are, but it's the age of beauty."

"Wait now," said Honoria, dimpling delightfully, "and I'll come with you. I can just lock the door and take the key in my pocket. There's no business doing between now and four o'clock. Wait, till I put away these things."

She was closing the cases and laying them away within the bureau.

"I suppose they are grand," she said. "But, sure, what would they be without the man? I've heard of people selling their souls for the likes of them. Sure, they aren't half as lovely as the leaves on the trees in spring or the flowers in the hedges."

They went down through the wood to Castle Morrogh. Mary, amid a crowd of wildly joyful dogs, met them half-way.

"I was coming to look for you, darling," she said to her mother. "I thought you'd have gone up to Honoria. When is Maurice coming back, Honoria? He will be asked to my wedding, and he must come."

"I'm afraid Maurice will be far away by January, Miss Mary."

"How unkind of him!"

Mary's lip quivered a little, and she looked very young.

"He has not written since he went to Kilcreagh," she said. "And I have written to him several times. I am so sorry for Maurice. Life must be so lonesome for him now. But he should not forget his old friends."

"Indeed I'm sure he doesn't, Miss Mary. Maurice was never like that, especially with you and her Ladyship. He thought the world and all of both of you. Maybe he thinks you're too much taken up now to have time to read his letters."

Mary coloured.

"Maurice would not be so stupid," she said. "He

knows me better than to think that one thing pushes out another with me."

Lady de Burgh left them walking on the terrace to explain things to each other and went upstairs. Her heart was heavy within her for the task she had before her.

CHAPTER XIX

THE SEARCH

Bridget took the bad news better than Lady de Burgh had dared to hope. Indeed it seemed a relief to her that the calamity had to be faced, that others were concerned with it besides herself. She looked up when the tale was told, a film of suffering upon her eyes which made Elizabeth de Burgh's compassionate heart bleed for her.

"You won't be thinkin' any more," she said, "that I was a great ould bother wid the letters goin' wrong, like as if the post-office was troublin' to send my letters wrong any more than another's. You'll believe now that I was right when I knew Bawn was in danger."

"Yes, yes," said Lady de Burgh, her hand on Bridget's shoulder. "You were right all the time. A mother's heart knows."

"Your own does often be heavy," Bridget put in, looking up with a glance curiously penetrating, yet full of affection.

"We'll find Bawn. A sensible modest girl like Bawn does not get lost in London. You've just got to pray—pray hard as you never prayed in your life before—and keep your own counsel. If you must

cry, poor Bridget, cry when you are alone with God. Don't let anyone see your tears for Bawn, who is in the hands of God, and therefore safe."

"Is it me to be settin' their tongues waggin' about my little girl? There's many a one would like to believe bad of her because she's so pretty to look at, and so delicate in her ways, like a lady. Is it her own mother to give them a handle?"

Lady de Burgh was satisfied. Bridget went on with her packing. Whenever during the day she looked into the nurseries she found Bridget attending to some detail of the packing, washing handkerchiefs, mending, ironing out a dainty frock of Miss Mary's which had fallen in creases. Her face was as expressionless as the Sphinx. Her lips moved incessantly. She was fulfilling that precept of praying hard, harder than she had ever done in her life before.

Sir Hugo, when he came home and heard his wife's story, was for writing to Christopher to take the matter in hand. They had lived out of the world a long time and had not kept in touch with London. Christopher would know what to do. But for some reason or other Lady de Burgh was averse from asking Christopher's assistance.

They finally compromised on Mr. Davison, a member of an old-fashioned firm of solicitors in Lincoln's Inn with whom Sir Hugo had had dealings, who would know how to set about the matter of finding the missing girl, although Sir Hugo could not see why Christopher should not be brought into the matter. Very often he had failed to understand his wife's decisions, but he had grown to have faith

in them. Nearly always she had been right. He made a mental reservation in this matter of Christopher. He had some hazy understanding of why Elizabeth did not hit it off with Christopher, as he had an unspoken wonder about Christopher's attraction for Mary. In this matter, where it would have been perfectly simple to hand on the case of the missing girl to Christopher, his wife's opposition arose, he supposed, from the natural maternal jealousy. After all, Davison was on the spot. No use troubling Christopher unnecessarily, seeing that he was so busy about politics.

Sir Hugo had a couple of men to shoot with him while Elizabeth was buying fineries for Mary. They had put up at the Shelbourne Hotel, where all Dublin came and went, where everybody who was anybody visiting Dublin or Ireland was safe to be met with sooner or later. Not the modern caravanserai, but a judicious blending of old-fashioned comfort and kindliness with up-to-date briskness; "Kindly Irish of the Irish" in the welcome it gave the stranger, as Lady de Burgh gratefully acknowledged.

They were busy all day shopping and fitting and trying on. Mary had never had a superfluity of pretty things. She protested against the new extravagance, while she blushed and smiled over the beautiful fabrics, and the charming picture she herself presented as she was turned about by skirt-hands and bodice-hands to view herself in the long glasses.

The part of Mary's trousseau that appealed most to her mother was being made at the Convent at

Carramoyne, a few miles from Castle Morrogh. The be-ribboned underclothing, the delicious veinings and embroideries and lacings appeal to the woman as no outside garments do. Handling some of the pretty things one day at the Convent the tears had come in Lady de Burgh's eyes. They recalled the baby-things in their making for the one precious infant, who had grown up so innocent and dear, who was giving herself to Christopher. Oh, if she could only have chosen Mary's husband how different this business of the trousseau would have been, how sweet and joyful! The bridegroom should have been in all things the antithesis of Christopher. He should have been dark, slender, fine, with a sudden sweetness in his smile, a bright alertness, boyish and slender, not promising heaviness in later life like Christopher. Was she thinking of M. de Luynes in his charming young manhood? Or was it?—but, oh no, dear and pleasant as he was she had not got to the point of choosing Maurice for a son-in-law.

She hurried over the trousseau, being anxious to get back to Sir Hugo, who missed his feminine belongings. The wet winter had set in at Castle Morrogh. It was the one thing Elizabeth de Burgh did not love in Ireland, the warm humidity of the climate. She often longed for the sparkling frosts, the hard dry nor'-easter of England. The wet season was apt to have a depressing effect even on those who were accustomed to it all their days. Sir Hugo, going hither and thither about his country business, would come home of evenings wet to the skin from the all-penetrating downpour of South-

Western Ireland; would postpone changing, or refuse to change, unless his wife was there to insist.

The people in the shops, the dressmakers, the tailors were dismayed at this haste about the trousseau. It is not only the Irish Celt who acts on the saying "It will be all the same in a hundred years." But Lady de Burgh had a compelling way with her when she chose to put it forth, and the last fitting took place in quite a record time, even if a good part of the trousseau had to follow by rail or parcel post.

There was a letter about Bawn when they got home. Mr. Davison recounted the progress of the inquiries. Not much result so far—"But," the letter concluded, "we have discovered a curious thing. There is another person looking for the young lady. We know the man who is acting for him or her, but of course he will not give away his client's identity."

A little later, the private detective Mr. Davison had employed discovered an old porter at Euston, who remembered the arrival of a young lady who might or might not have been Bawn. He had been away for a couple of weeks with bronchitis and no one had remembered to mention the fact. So that when the preliminary inquiries were made at Euston there had been no result, although a good many porters were quite willing to remember Bawn or imagine they remembered her.

James Duffy's story was probable. The young lady had arrived by the Irish express in the

early morning. She had looked up and down the platform as if expecting someone. Then she had caught sight of James Duffy, had asked him if he had seen any nuns waiting about.

There were no nuns, but he remembered to have seen two nuns waiting when the mail train came in. He had lost sight of them in the bustle of arrival and had not seen them again. Then she had said " in a voice like as if she was going to cry " that they must have made a mistake or she had : and, recognising her voice for Irish, he had suggested that she should stay at the hotel for the night, that the nuns would surely look for her again in the morning. To this she had assented with obvious relief—" like as if I was an angel out of Heaven come to help her from a tight place," was James Duffy's description. He had found her trunk and got it on to the truck, and, bidding her follow him, he had wheeled it along the platform. But there was a big crowd of people, for there was a train in on the other side from the North, and he had lost sight of her, so he had waited a bit and she had come and told him that he could take the trunk to the cloak-room, for she had met a friend who was going to look after her. She had put a shilling into his hand—" instead o' the tuppence I was more used to "—and had turned back and disappeared in the crowd.

" I never seen light or sight of her after," said James Duffy, " an' I don't know but what her trunk's atin' up tuppences every day since in the cloak-room. I'm very sorry if she's come to harm. Many a wan does, through not knowin' their way in London.

But she was a fine grown-up young woman an' I couldn't be forcin' my attentions upon her."

A search in the cloak-room revealed the fact that the trunk was still there "atin' up tuppences."

No cabman on the authorised rank had any memory of Bawn as a fare. There had been a strike among the railway-cabmen just about the time of Bawn's arrival, and unauthorised vehicles had plied for hire.

The next thing was by advertisement to discover the cabman. But advertisement failed to help. Of course it was possible that Bawn's friend might have had a private carriage, or they might have walked into the street and proceeded by 'bus or train—there were several possibilities. The fact remained that all the inquiries could get no further; and there was Bawn's trunk lying unclaimed, a curiously depressing bit of evidence by suggestion, as though Bawn could have no possible further use for a trunk in the place to which she had travelled.

Mr. Davison's private detective was acting with great energy, discovering many people who might have been Bawn, and hunting them down only to discover that they did not the least bit in the world resemble her.

Authorisation having been received the trunk had been opened; but nothing had been found to elucidate the mystery. The end of the first week of December found Mr. Davison cautiously depressed, although the detective was quite hopeful still, he reported, and working away in other directions than those which had brought them up in a cul-de-sac.

Meanwhile Bridget looked almost at breaking-point. Her eyes were sunk in her head. She had grown very thin and old. Where she had been a comely, high-coloured woman a few months ago, she was now thin to attenuation, her cheek-bones so sharpened that you could fancy you saw the skeleton within. She still kept proudly aloof from the world, and still her lips moved incessantly, "praying harder than ever she did in her life." She kept to the nurseries, where she sat and knitted stockings for Sir Hugo, her lips going all the time. There was a moment every morning when Lady de Burgh came into the nurseries after breakfast, and Bridget looked at her with a wild surmise, as though all the world hung on her lips. That moment was an ordeal against which Elizabeth de Burgh had to steel herself.

"There is no news, Bridget," she would say, and Bridget would answer, "Sure, I knew there couldn't be *yet*"; and would fall to the hard praying again.

The whole house felt the tension. There had been a time, soon after Bawn's disappearance, when one or two of the neighbouring women had remarked to Lady de Burgh:

"I hear there's the grand news of Bawn O'Connor, but the mother doesn't seem too plazed wid it all" —or some such saying which startled Lady de Burgh before she realised that Bridget had defended her child by a heroic lie.

But now that a new post-mistress was at Mount Lambert Post Office it could not long be hidden from the neighbours, eagerly curious about everything,

that no letters addressed to Mrs. O'Connor came from Spain.

It was not easy to be very happy or in festal mood over the approaching wedding: and the weather was behaving very badly, raining day after day, with wild storms night after night; and the wild geese flying in the sky, which the people said was always a sign of bad weather to come. If the sun showed at all it was towards evening as a perfectly white orb, with long rays about him, looking over the edge of a dense cloud.

Christopher was expected for Christmas. Sir Hugo, coming in from shooting, wet over his knees, wished there was not so much bog to his shooting; and grumbled of hunting days that the scent did not hold well, that the very foxes were flooded out of their earths.

Honoria and her bridegroom had gone off early in December on their long honeymoon. Maurice wrote to Lady de Burgh that he was free, that he was not to leave England till January: that meanwhile he was in London and at her service. He had called on Mr. Davison, and that gentleman wrote that the eminent detective agency he had employed having failed so far, there remained a chance for the intelligent amateur; and that Mr. Roche seemed possessed of a tremendous energy as well as an absorbing interest in the matter of Bawn's disappearance. Plainly the good gentleman believed that Maurice had a peculiar interest in Bawn.

"He has taken it to heart," he wrote. "He is not the least bit in the world like an undergraduate down

for Christmas Vac. He looks haggard and careworn. I believe he spends all his time on this quest. Mrs. Davison has asked him to spend Christmas at Sydenham. He will come for the day ; no more. He walks the streets and haunts the churches of your religion. I believe he hopes he may find her in one of the churches. No use pointing out to him that if a beautiful girl disappears of her own free will she is not likely to be found haunting the churches. My man is very pessimistic, but of course his pride is concerned. If he has not discovered Miss O'Connor no one else is likely to."

Maurice sent no word of his doings. One of those days came his wedding present for Mary—a ring of pearls set all round the circle, an old-fashioned but beautiful thing which must have cost a sum disproportionate to Maurice's modest fortune. It arrived one morning after Sir Hugo had gone out: and Mary carried it off to her own room. When she emerged her eyes were red. Her mother wondered why she had wept over Maurice's ring, but she asked no questions. It was part of her code of honour to permit Mary to have reservations with her, if she would.

Mr. Davison wrote again a little later.

" Galbraith—(the detective)—is offended and has thrown up the case. Not on account of our amateur —oh, no. But the third person interested has put on Combe and Vernon, Galbraith's great rivals, and has given them *carte blanche* about spending money. He won't be persuaded that we have not gone behind his back.

"Mr. Roche wears himself out but accomplishes nothing. He tells me he has got a list of all the Irish priests in London and goes from one to another. There is a considerable number to be got through. There may be method in this madness. He works as though he had only a short time to get through, which I suppose is the case, since he goes to California in January, I understand. Poor boy, no one would grudge him the distraction of his energy."

All the time, while the dark days of rain and wind went over, Bridget, more than ever a recluse in her nurseries, grew thinner and fiercer-looking, till her mistress began to fear for her reason as well as her life. And all the time Bridget's lips moved. Whether she slept or not Lady de Burgh, watching her pitifully, could not have told; but if she did her prayers went on in sleep that brought no rest to her eyes nor refreshment to the parched and strained anguish of her face.

CHAPTER XX

THE WEDDING DRESS

Christopher arrived a week before Christmas, and, seeing him, Mary seemed to forget everything else. He had come laden with gifts. No one could say that he was not extravagantly generous to his bride. He had brought the family jewels reset; and, on the evening of his arrival, he insisted on Mary's decking herself in barbaric splendour with as many of the jewels as she could possibly wear.

He had an imperious, masterful lover's way with Mary now as always, the way Elizabeth de Burgh had found hard to bear and her husband had resented almost equally, in his masculine fashion. Still, Christopher was less exuberant; he had sobered. Flashes of the old Christopher would break out, but, even to his prospective mother-in-law's mind, he was more tolerable than he had been.

Of course, he engrossed Mary completely: that was Christopher's way; but no one could say that Mary was not willing to be engrossed. The lovers were left much to themselves. It had to be so, although Sir Hugo was restive and thought that even with engaged people chaperonage should be the rule. He began to be jealous perhaps in the

father's way of his girl and the encroachments of another male: yet Christopher was less exuberantly exacting than of old, less demonstrative, and for so much Elizabeth de Burgh was grateful.

It was tea-time on the second day of Christopher's presence in the house and Lady de Burgh had come down to the hall for tea. She had found only Christopher standing with his back to the fire, teasing the dogs. He had a way of making the gentlest dog snap at him without meaning to be cruel.

Sir Hugo was out hunting. Christopher had refused to follow, saying that he preferred the fireside in such weather; at which saying his future father-in-law had made a rather bitter jest which did not seem to affect Christopher particularly.

The kettle was boiling. She had made the tea, Christopher helping her so far as to hand her the kettle from its place in the fender and return it again. She had asked where Mary was, and he had returned in his self-conscious way—"Why, *belle mère*, how should I know!" He had no idea that Lady de Burgh disliked his calling her *belle mère*; but if he had that would not have deterred him.

She noticed that he kept watching the stairs, which ascended to an arch curtained with heavy red velvet curtains, beyond which lay the inner hall.

Glancing up at him as she handed him his tea, she had an idea that he did not look well. He had fined down somewhat, perhaps by reason of his electioneering labours. Well, Christopher could afford to lose flesh. Another second and she thought she

had been mistaken. The look of exultation she detested had sprung to his face.

She followed his eyes to see what had brought it there, although, of course, she knew without being told that it was Mary. She had an intuition that Mary had resisted Christopher for some considerable time. She could remember a time when Mary had not liked Christopher. Now there was always about him the air of the captor.

What she saw amazed her. Mary had lifted the velvet curtains and come through under the arch. The curtains had fallen behind her, making a background for her white glories, for she was wearing her wedding gown, which had arrived from the Dublin shop that morning.

The bridal veil floated about her face. She was looking down. The dress, slightly lifted in front, revealed her white satin shoes with broad buckles of old paste. The wedding dress, draped with Lady de Burgh's Limerick lace, looped with a rope of pearls, trimmed lavishly with pearl embroidery, was exquisite as a setting for the soft young beauty of Mary's shy and radiant face.

She stood a minute so—a lovely vision, before Christopher, with a little laugh, went to meet her and bowed his head to kiss her. The mother felt that the girl was too gentle, too fair, too innocent for any man. She resented Christopher's kiss and his low laugh of triumph.

The handle of the outer door turned and Sir Hugo came in, wet and mud-stained from the day's hunting. He paused as he beheld the vision of Mary and

was silent, as though the beauty of his girl had struck him dumb.

"Rehearsing, eh?" he said, standing by the fire, the riding-crop still in his hand.

He came forward to the tea-table, flinging the crop and his gloves on to a settle.

"Give me a cup of tea before I go to change, Elizabeth," he said.

Mary had come down the flight of steps and was standing shyly under all their eyes.

"Not afraid of ill-luck, Moll—eh?" Sir Hugo asked cheerfully. "If the servants see you they won't expect any wedding. You ought to have been out, Christopher, instead of hanging about after Mary. We had a thirty-five minutes run after an old dog fox. He beat us at last by swimming the Suck river. The flood carried him down, but he saved his skin for another day. The river was all over the place and roaring like a mill-race. They had to whip off the hounds or the whole pack were for drowning themselves. They would not have the cunning of the fox to go with the stream and scramble out when it got between banks."

"I don't like your Irish hunting. I prefer the Shires," said Christopher. "I hate your stone walls and the ditches the other side. I brought down the whole wall when I tried them, and nearly broke my own neck and the horse's, to say nothing of an old witch of a woman sitting right under us in the lane."

"You were riding an English horse," said Sir Hugo, lifting the tea to his lips. "The Irish horse

knows how to bunch himself up with his legs under him and clear wall and ditch and all."

Mary, picking up her skirts, ran off the way she had come.

A little later, in the nurseries, where Bridget marking some of Miss Mary's trousseau garments looked up as her mistress came in to express a bitter contempt for the " sewing hands " of some of the Dublin shops, the subject of Mary's rehearsal came up again. Bridget was more cheerful since she knew that Maurice Roche was searching for Bawn. Some of the hard tension had gone from her face. She looked more natural, less as though she were in feverish pain.

" Sure, what were ye about at all," she said, with the freedom accorded to Miss Mary's foster-mother, " to be lettin' that child put on her weddin' dress ? I near dropped in the passage when I caught a sight of her flutterin' along like one of the saints in Heaven. Didn't you know it was one of the unluckiest things she could do ? That Celia, the under-housemaid, kem in here just now wid a packet o' candles. ' They're sayin' below in the servants' hall,' she says, ' that there'll be no weddin' because Miss Mary's put on her weddin' dress before the day.' ' Go out o' this,' says I, ' an' don't be showin' your impident face and bringin' yer ould chat into *my* nursery. Go down an' tell them that's talkin' that, if their fingers clapped as hard as their ignorant tongues, the place would be better kept, so it would.' She was for answerin' me rale impident, but I took her by the two shoulders an' I pushed her out an' bolted the door behind her."

"Is the house so badly kept, Bridget?" Lady de Burgh asked mildly. She was glad to see the militant spirit awake in Bridget again. The silent Bridget, with the burning eyes and perpetually moving lips, had been rather dreadful.

"'Deed no; they're not too bad at all. It was only the impidence of her, comin' talkin' about the Family, made me say it. All the same you shouldn't have allowed it. A nice thing it would be now if all them clothes was to go into the wardrobes and drop to bits wid the moth an' the damp, for where would Miss Mary be wearin' the things here?"

Lady de Burgh did not rebuke Bridget, as she ought to have done, for her superstition. Instead a vision came to her of green pastures and cool waters in an arid land—of Mary given back to her and Christopher gone away out of their lives.

As she went down the corridor to her own room she abandoned herself for a moment to the vision of that deliverance. If only it would not hurt the child! She and Hugo and Mary together, and the threat of the world, as Christopher brought it for Mary, passed away for ever. She had learned to dread the world as the saints dreaded it. It was so long since she, the daughter of an English statesman, who had been hostess for her father when he was in office, had touched with the world of her own will. It had been brought to her quiet close by Christopher and Christopher's mother, and she had received it unwillingly. Her prayer for Mary had been that she might be kept unspotted from the world. And

lo, the world had come to her ewe-lamb and Mary was stepping into it smiling and unafraid.

She turned aside into her little oratory, and prayed that the marriage might not be. Up to this time she had prayed that Mary in Christopher's world, the world of the rich and pleasure-seeking, might keep her white soul unspotted and not forget the loyalties and ideals she had derived of her mother, perhaps even before she was born.

She prayed against the marriage as though she had suddenly realized that it would be for evil. She prayed against it, but she left the issue with God.

Mary came into her mother's room a little later wearing one of her new frocks, a billowy thing of chiffon and lace, with holly-berries and green leaves in her hair. Round her slim throat Christopher's emeralds pulsed like green flames.

"Do you like it?" she asked shyly.

"Do I always like and love you, my little daughter?" the mother said with a maternal passion that awed the girl.

Elizabeth de Burgh was wondering in her own mind how Mary would regard her if she could know of that prayer, which, leaving the issue to God, had given her own heart a strange peace.

An incident at the dinner-table justified her prayer, took away her last doubt that she had been right in praying against the marriage. Something had vexed Christopher out of his usual easy temper. He had looked rather gloomy at first and afterwards was irritable with Sir Hugo in a discussion of the

eternal Irish question. Sir Hugo, like many Irish Unionists, was more intolerant of English pretensions than any Irish Nationalist. There had been some sharp thrusts between the two, and it came to Sir Hugo's turn to be gloomy. Christopher, on the contrary, became gay, and the ardour of his manner to Mary, which Sir Hugo had privately described as "ill-bred" in his conferences with his wife, increased.

He had caught on to Sir Hugo's remark about Mary's premature wearing of her wedding-gown.

"Is it possible," he asked, "that the natives here believe such a folly?"

"I rather imagine," said Sir Hugo, "that it is a superstition we share with the English natives."

"Oh, I never heard it. Our superstitions are bad enough—love-philtres, witches, corpse-candles—but they have more sense than yours."

He stooped to Mary's pretty ear and said something about a love-philtre, at which she blushed and lifted a deprecating glance towards her father and mother before veiling her eyes again.

Sir Hugo was grumpy. Mary used to look at the world with the clear unafraid eyes of a child. Now she was always blushing and looking down before Christopher's gaze. He turned abruptly to his wife and told her some matter of local interest, some small adventure of the day.

"Oh, I'm not superstitious," said Christopher, in an undertone which could be heard round the table. "I'm very glad you put on that lovely frock to please me. Ill-omen indeed! You looked simply

ripping, darling. I defy God or the devil to prevent our marriage now."

"Oh!"

Mary's ejaculation had a horror-stricken sound. Her mother had turned pale. Sir Hugo looked very stern.

"Oh, I'm sorry," said Christopher gaily. "I'm afraid I've trodden on all your toes. You see, if one doesn't believe in these personages one is apt to forget."

He brushed the matter away as lightly as that and turned to talk of other things, not knowing in the least how he had affected his hearers nor realising the challenge he had flung out.

It was not so easily forgotten by those who heard him. Sir Hugo shut himself into his own den that evening, forsaking the drawing-room; and when his wife came to him there he ordered her gruffly to go back and look after her daughter.

"You give Mary too much of her own way," he said unjustly: and then realised the injustice and drew her to his side fondly.

"I shall be better, darling," he said with contrition, "when we are alone. It will be like the days before we had Mary, when we were all in all to each other. Why should we stick on here when Mary is gone? Let the American have it—and we shall go travelling to your heart's content."

The matter about letting the house had been in abeyance since Mary's engagement had come about.

She stooped down and kissed him.

"Poor Mary!" she said. "She can't help it. It is Christopher's fault."

"I'm disappointed in her. *Your daughter!* You've spoilt me for other people's standards of taste. How can she endure Christopher at times? I had all I could do not to tell him to go out of my house to-night, at dinner."

He had forgotten easily, in a man's way, his approval of the engagement.

CHAPTER XXI

FLIGHT

"THERE's a letter on the candle," said Bridget, two or three nights later, when her mistress went in to say good-night. "I'm thinkin' it'll be from Mr. Maurice Roche. And it'll bring good news, maybe."

"Perhaps it will, Bridget," said Lady de Burgh, "but if it doesn't come to-morrow, it will surely be coming soon."

She was only too glad that it was not a winding-sheet Bridget found on the candle or a coffin in some cinder that had jumped from the fire. Superstition always depressed her. It was the shadow, the distorted shadow of faith. On this side faith was the clear sunlight: across the dividing line lay the terror that flieth by night.

There was not a letter in the morning, but a buff-covered envelope lay on the tray which held the morning cup of tea — a telegram. Lady de Burgh reached for it and took it into a hand trembling with eagerness and with fear. If it was to say the search was at an end, how was she to tell Bridget?

She felt she could not open the telegram under the curious eye of the maid, Celia, the protagonist in that encounter with Bridget. Celia, watching from under her long thick lashes, mentioned that the telegram had come last night, but the new woman at the post-office was that disobliging that she did not send it down.

She went off to tell the kitchen that her Ladyship was all a-flutter over the telegram, but had not opened it in her presence, and was reduced to tears by the savage satire of the cook, who, baffled of a tit-bit of news, asked her whether she thought it right to be gapin' at people wid her tongue hangin' out for gossip whin they were readin' their private letters.

Very soon the kitchen was in wild surmise. Her Ladyship was going away and Bridget with her, leaving by the twelve-o'clock train. "An' indeed," said the cook, "it'll be somethin' will be takin' her Ladyship away, wid all the love-makin' goin' on—for young ladies of quality must have what they calls a shaperong when they're courtin', not like the likes o' *ye* that can be goin' to the divil your own way."

"Her Ladyship do be watchin' Miss Mary and Sir Christopher the same as a cat do be watchin' a canary," put in Ellen Anne Kearney, who waited at table in the absence of the butler, and had more opportunities than the others of close observation.

"I'll thank ye not to be makin' them despicable remarks about your betters in my kitchen," said the

cook. "Here, off wid ye about your business! There's plenty for me to do if the rest of yez can twitter like a nest o' stares. Ellen Anne Kearney, you'd idle a barrack, so you would. Celia O'Gara, whin I was in my first place, if I wore a cap like that, the housekeeper 'd whip it from my head an' fling it at the back o' the fire. Her Ladyship's too aisy-goin', so she is. Am I right, Mr. Keogh?"

Mr. Keogh, who could have been nothing else in the world but a butler, a silent man, agreed that the cook was quite right, at the same time giving a solemn wink to the culprits ere they scattered.

The telegram was from Maurice. It merely said, "Can you come?" Nothing more to whet the appetite of the village, deriving its information from the post-office, excited to the point of anguish by this starveling morsel.

As it happened Sir Hugo had a few free days. Frost had followed the rain-storms, a hard black frost which showed no sign of yielding, so that hunting was impossible. There was nothing to take him abroad except a petty-sessions court two days later. Nothing was said between the father and mother about any need for chaperonage of the lovers. That would have been contrary to their code of what was right. Some things might be said and some things might not. That was a thing that might not be said. Either would have found speech on such a subject unendurable.

"Christopher keeps to the house too much," Sir

Hugo said, making geometrical patterns with his pen on the blotting-pad of his desk, while his wife stood by his side, looking down at him with tender affection. "He'll be like the great tun of Heidelberg before he's forty if he doesn't look out. It's grand weather for out-of-doors. I shan't be lonely till you come back. I shall make Christopher walk."

No more was said, but Elizabeth de Burgh departed with a heart at ease, or as much at ease as it could be under the circumstances.

She had plenty of time to think during the long journey up to Dublin, while Bridget sat quietly in her corner of the carriage saying innumerable rosaries and so apparently keeping suspense and terror at bay. They had gone through without stopping. Neither could have borne to wait a night in Dublin—but Lady de Burgh had found time to send a telegram to Maurice, saying that they would arrive at Euston by the morning train.

With a book open in her lap and a scatter of newspapers and magazines about her, she had thought a good deal, even while she seemed to be reading. There are certain crises of life when books other than spiritual fail to reach the intelligence—times when the thoughts work upon each other incessantly, grinding as the quern-stones grind the corn. It was such a time with Elizabeth de Burgh. She was weary with the journey, yet she was quite wakeful, painfully awake, as though sleep and she had nothing to do with each other. Even her little "Imitation"

which she had brought out of her handbag failed to hold her. The tranquillity, the detachment, were not for her. She was troubled about many things.

She had given no reason for her sudden journey when she had announced it at the breakfast table. The young people had arrived late or she had breakfasted early, for she had all but finished when Christopher came in, following Mary after a short interval. Standing up by her chair she had asked to be excused because of her impending journey.

"Going to London, Mamma!" cried Mary, "but you never go to London! and you never go anywhere without me."

"It is time that I should learn to do without you," Lady de Burgh answered. "I am called away on business. Bridget will go with me. I shall be only a few days away."

She had not waited for further questionings from Mary, who knew nothing of the mystery of Bawn's disappearance. She counted on Christopher's way of monopolising Mary—she wondered how the child could endure it—to save her the embarrassment of Mary's questions.

But she had caught a curious look in Christopher's eyes. If it had not seemed too improbable she would have thought that fear—followed by defiance—sprang at her from Christopher's eyes. It was the merest flash; then he was coolly smiling, wishing her a good journey, prophesying a smooth crossing.

That look in Christopher's eyes recurred to her. There was another impression. Christopher had changed since the summer. He had been distracted and moody at times of late—not always the flamboyant lover. She had been almost glad of his moods, despite the air of a piteous bewilderment which had hurt her in Mary.

As she had hoped, when the train ran into Euston, there was Maurice on the platform, scanning the carriage-windows eagerly for her. She sprang out as lightly as Mary might have done, while Bridget followed her more clumsily, keeping close to her to catch the first fateful word.

"I have found her," he said. "She has been very ill. That was why you did not hear. She will soon be well enough to go home."

"Oh, glory be to God!" muttered Bridget in an impassioned whisper.

"I suggest that we breakfast at the hotel here. You must be very tired. It will not be possible to see Bawn till later. She is at the Hospital of the Holy Cross up Finchley way. No visitors are allowed before twelve. The Rev. Mother—the Hospital is in charge of the Sisters of the Holy Cross—will, I think, make an exception in our favour. But we cannot well go before ten o'clock. There will be time for a rest after breakfast."

At the hotel they left Maurice to order breakfast while Lady de Burgh had a bath and changed from her dusty travelling clothes. Bridget had her breakfast while this was being done, and looked up, as her

lady passed the table, with such a happy face that it made Lady de Burgh put aside her own anxieties with a feeling that she must emulate poor Bridget and pray hard so that all should come right.

Euston had already begun to be very busy with the crowded morning trains for the City men coming in from the outlying districts; but many people were not too hurried to turn round and look curiously after Elizabeth de Burgh's tall and stately figure in its veils of clinging black, with a passing wonder as to who she might be.

"Looks like a queen," one man, carrying a bag, said to another.

"Like some queens," his companion amended cynically.

As Maurice had expected, the central hall at Euston was empty, save for those who rushed through from one swing door to another. They sat down on one of the seats in the centre. It was at this hour of the morning as good a place as could be found in the heart of London for a quiet talk. Bridget had gone upstairs to re-pack for her mistress.

"All being well," Lady de Burgh had said to her, "we shall sleep here to-night and take the midday express home to-morrow, unless indeed you decide to stay with Bawn till she is able to travel. We may be able to arrange that."

"Well?" she asked, turning her beautiful eyes on Maurice as they found themselves in the oasis of chairs, secluded from the hurrying streams of top-

hatted, frock-coated men, the shop-girls, the clerks, all the tide that flows into London every morning and turns in the late afternoon. "Well?"

Maurice became suddenly very red. He was carrying a paper in his hand, which he used by way of a screen, as though he was waiting for a train.

"There is something more to tell," he said, smoothing the paper out on his knee.

"I knew it," she answered. "Poor Bridget finds it enough to know that her girl is alive and well. She asks no questions—*yet*. Oh, Maurice—what about that disappearance? Where was Bawn? How did she come to be picked up there—so far away from Euston? Maurice, there is no reason why she should not come back—or even go to the Spanish situation which is yet unfilled?"

"There is no reason," he said; and the terror in her face relaxed. "Only, perhaps—she should be with her mother quietly for a while, somewhere. Perhaps it will not be necessary to tell her mother—yet. I am sure she will not go back. Indeed her mind is set against it."

His face was strangely agitated.

"I wish she could have told you herself. I wish I had not to tell you."

Her eyes distended as she gazed at him. Some glimmering of the truth came to her.

"What is it?" she asked.

He began speaking rapidly, in a low voice, as though the words hurt him.

"It will be a blow to you, Lady de Burgh. It will be a worse blow to Miss Mary. It was Sir Christopher Damer who decoyed Bawn from Euston station."

He paused for a second before going on.

"The poor girl has told me everything. Thank God it is no worse. It seems that he had been pursuing her, making love to her while he was under your roof—even while"—he spoke with fierce indignation—"he was daring to lift his eyes to Miss Mary. Those afternoons when he went out with a gun: oh, it was not after game he was: it was human game. He was leading this poor girl astray—having secret meetings with her in the woods. She never doubted his honesty of purpose. Even now she will have it that he was in love with her—'only of course she was a poor girl,' she says. It seems the thing was going on for some time, all during the weeks when Miss Mary was with her friends in Dublin. It doesn't take long for a thing like that to grow. He was furious when there was a question of her going to Spain. He forbade it, and she was only too willing to stay—where he was."

Without looking at Lady de Burgh he went on.

"At last she broke free from him. Something came to her knowledge about him and Miss Mary. She was like a mad thing. He had gone away, as you remember. He had made her promise not to go to Spain. She wrote to take back her promise."

A porter came with a broom and began sweeping round about them. Maurice paused. Lady de Burgh heaved the most impatient of sighs.

Maurice took out a shilling and beckoned the porter to him.

"You are not to sweep, please, or let anyone else sweep, till this lady and I have gone."

"All right, sir."

The porter went off with a beaming face; and she looked her thanks at Maurice, who was presenting himself to her in a new light. She had not thought of him as this resourceful, commanding person, who knew his way so well about and how to enforce his wishes.

"Well, that letter," he went on, "whether deliberately or not, gave him the clue about her coming to London. She says he told her he had met the Irish trains for two days running. He had nothing to do with the nuns not meeting her, of course. That was just a misunderstanding. Well, there he was in the nick of time, as she was experiencing the sheer terror of a creature who has been dropped in this vast wicked London, about which she had had so many warnings at Castle Morrogh. She had had rather a rough passage. She had not slept. She was exhausted. He gave her a good meal. He told her that she must wait till the Irish mail arrived in the afternoon at Euston. The nuns were sure to be there.

"After the meal he took her for a drive through London in a taxi-cab. You have seen them in the streets. They say they will kill out the hansoms.

The time passed quickly. He kept telling her that they would be back at Euston in time for the nuns. 'If I do not find them ?' she asked. 'Then you had better go back to Ireland,' he replied. 'You cannot travel alone, a child like you. Or you had better look up the nun who was responsible for sending you. It was great good luck I managed to strike you on the platform. What would have become of you ?'

"The taxi deposited them finally at a West End shop.

"'I am going to fit you out here,' he said. 'Those things you are wearing wrong your beauty.'

"She began to be frightened and he laughed. He said something that frightened her still more. It was then he told her that he had spent two days watching the trains. 'You should have been more definite,' he said.

"He bought lavishly for her and gave an address in the West End to which the things were to be sent. She only caught part of the address, for he moved to a distance to give it. Hats, mantles, dresses, shoes, gloves—he seemed not to care what he spent: and the shop-people were obsequious. They called her 'Madam,' evidently thinking that he was her husband. She was in a daze of terror. At last he left her for a few minutes looking at some furs. A tall, handsome, tragical-looking young woman, with pale golden hair, extravagantly dressed in a black silk gown, what you call a *mannequin* I believe, while showing her the furs said in a low voice :

"'The gentleman is not your husband?'

"'No.'

"'And you are frightened of him? I know the look—like the rabbit in the rattlesnake's cage at the Zoo. There is a door there. Run! I shall send him the other way.'

"The poor child went. A 'bus had stopped outside the shop. She had barely strength to climb into it. As it moved off she saw him come out of the shop, look eagerly one way and another, and go back again.

"The 'bus put her off at Finchley. She walked into the fields. It began to grow dark and she was frightened. She saw such strange furtive creatures about. She hurried back towards the lights and the people. Something frightened her; one of the human beasts of prey she had seen prowling about under the trees had followed her. She gave him her purse to go away, but he still followed though he took it. In her terror of him she darted across the road, right under the wheels of a van she had not heard approaching. She was knocked down. The driver of the van picked her up and carried her to the Holy Cross. She had a nasty wound in the head—the horse must have kicked her—and she was only semi-conscious for several days. Now she is convalescent. As to how I came to find her—here is Bridget. There is no time for more. You must meet Father Connolly through whom I found Bawn. The nuns were so distressed about their patient, who even when she was getting well did nothing but weep."

"Oh, is it you, Bridget?" said Lady de Burgh. "You look quite recovered from the tiresome journey. From what Mr. Roche has been telling me I think I shall leave you with Bawn and go back myself to-night."

CHAPTER XXII

THE CLEAR COURSE

THERE was just time to take Bridget to a quiet room and tell her the story which Lady de Burgh had heard from Maurice. She was very pale as she told it. She had had a fear that Bridget, with the somewhat *farouche* virtue of the Irish peasantry, might think first of Bawn's lapse from strict propriety in those meetings with Christopher Damer. But Bridget did not seem to think of that.

She listened in silence to the tale, now and again lifting her hands in horror or thanksgiving. When it was concluded she said, with a curious sternness:

"And, my Lady, what will your Ladyship do?"

"Go back and put an end to Miss Mary's engagement."

As she said it she was conscious of an immense lift of her heart, as for a great deliverance. Oh, how good God was to free her of the terror of this marriage! What would she have done if Mary had been already Christopher's wife? She could not think

of it. She was overwhelmed with a sense of God's goodness. Her lamb was safe and unspotted. And, thank God, Bawn had not taken harm. Bawn's angel had not deserted her. She had been in terrible danger and she had come out in a safe place. May the Name of the Lord be blest!

"He was never fit for her, the white lamb! But I thought he was a gentleman, being your own cousin, my Lady. I never thought he'd wrong a poor girl. Thank God my child's safe! I'll never leave her again. You may tell the Reverend Mother that I won't part from my child till she bids me go."

"Very well. I will let Dame Ethelburga know. You must not blame us, Bridget. We thought we were acting for the best. As for Christopher Damer, he is a far-away cousin. There is not much in blood between him and me; and from this day we are strangers."

"If he had hurt my girl I'd have choked him with my two hands, big and all as he is," Bridget said, with a sudden fierceness like a mother-animal.

Then she was as suddenly gentle.

"Don't think I could be for blamin' you," she said with a strange tenderness. "Wouldn't I put my two hands under your feet for you to walk on if it would do you the laste bit of good in the world?"

Lady de Burgh stooped from her stately height and kissed Bridget's weather-beaten cheek.

"I know you would," she said gently.

If she had any misgivings about Bridget's way

with her recovered daughter they were set at rest by the meeting. She had wished Bridget to go in alone to the room where Bawn awaited her, but Bridget would not hear of it.

"Didn't she give her milk up for Miss Mary?" she asked, "an' hasn't she some rights in you, seein' she's Miss Mary's foster-sister and the two of them that fond of each other that it might be a blood-tie?"

Bawn was sitting up in a cushioned chair. Her silky black hair was plaited in two long plaits and tied with blue ribbon. The plaits lay each side her face, which had little colour when they first caught sight of her.

She had drawn herself up weakly by the arms of her chair. Her eyes, the pupils distended, looked at them in terror. Her lips were parted over her little white teeth.

As she caught sight of them she shrank back almost as if she dreaded a blow, and a wave of scarlet rushed over her face from chin to brow, flooding the white throat that rose above the open neck of the blue linen loose gown she was wearing.

"Why, Bawn, my darling child," Lady de Burgh said, going to her: but Bawn looked beyond, with terror in her eyes, to her mother.

"Come and comfort her, Bridget!"

Bridget uttered a little cry and stumbled on her knees before Bawn. She put maternal arms about her child and held her close to her.

"I've been goin' through tortures about you, avourneen," she said. "It was killing me, so it was.

Thanks be to God for this day that gives you back to me."

"You're not angry with me, mother?" Bawn asked pitifully, like a child.

"Is it angry with you, my heart's treasure?"

"And her Ladyship?"

Bawn looked round the wings of her chair to catch sight of Lady de Burgh, who had walked to the window.

"Why should I be angry with you, dear child?" Elizabeth de Burgh said, coming to the girl and stroking her hair. "I am so grateful. You don't know what we have suffered in our anxiety for you —and the keeping it to ourselves. No one knows except your mother and myself and Sir Hugo and Mr. Roche. They had to know."

She had a sudden poignant sense of the difference between Bridget, a peasant with the peasant virtues and the peasant limitations, and this delicate creature she had brought into the world. Bawn was beautiful, and gentle and a lady. She was a credit to the nuns, but the nuns could not have made her what she was. She was God's making and a lady. Elizabeth de Burgh said to herself that Bawn *might* have been Mary's sister. There would have been no incongruity. A throw-back to gentle blood, doubtless. Were not the O'Connors Kings of Ireland once?

She did not smile over this latter thought as she might have done if she were Irish. The serious English nature saw no cause to smile.

"The thing that was breaking my heart since I

began to get better," said Bawn piteously, "was thinking that Miss Mary was maybe fond of him. He used to say she wasn't, but I know she was. It would be a terrible thing for me to come between Miss Mary and the one she wanted."

"Mary will be fond of him no longer when she knows!"

It came to Elizabeth de Burgh suddenly that Bawn had not heard of Mary's engagement.

"It is a dreadful thing I have done," said Bawn, bursting into tears. "He *made* me fond of him, but I ought to have run away from him to the ends of the earth, if so be it was going to hurt Miss Mary."

"Comfort her, Bridget," said Lady de Burgh hurriedly. "Tell her she is a foolish child. We have nothing but love for her. There is a knock at the door: I must answer it."

She left the child in her mother's arms, and, opening the door, passed out into the corridor, where a little nun with brown merry eyes under her big white cornette stood awaiting her.

"The Reverend Mother is free to see you now, Madam," she said.

She led the way along narrow corridors, full of the antiseptic and medicinal smells of the hospital, past half-open doors through which she caught a glimpse of long hospital wards and the various rooms connected with hospital work; finally opened a door on to a little covered bridge, the communication between the old Queen Anne house which was the convent and the big new naked buildings of the

hospital. Through the windows she caught a glimpse of the convent grounds, of buildings and gardens and copses, and of the near suburb and the distant London glittering in its pall of smoke, with here and there a sparkling high light, since the sun had come out.

The door of the other side of the bridge admitted them into the true convent quietness. They were in a broad corridor full of sun, with here and there a white statue against the brown-panelled walls, a vase of flowers, and a little brightly-coloured lamp. In the distance where another corridor intersected this one a nun passed with a soft swish of her trailing robes. From these windows the old garden of the convent was visible, a nun here and there, with a couple of patients, pacing the gravelled walks.

The Reverend Mother was a round-faced rosy Irishwoman, with peaceful grey-blue eyes and a mouth which gave indications of a keen sense of humour. Now she was all tender and quiet gravity over the case of Bawn O'Connor. She displayed a very shrewd and practical mind, quite agreeing with Lady de Burgh that neither Bawn nor her mother should return to Ireland just yet. She suggested a seaside House of the Order which would take them in while Bawn was convalescing. Afterwards—the nun shrugged her shoulders under the stiff *guimpe* expressively.

"Give us this day our daily bread," she said. "Never look beyond the moment. Do perfectly—or as perfectly as you can, the thing you are doing, and the future will take care of itself."

For the moment they could accommodate, in one of the rooms set apart for paying patients in the new building not yet occupied, Bawn and her mother.

" They will love to be together," she said. " Trouble of mind has been retarding that child's recovery. All will be well with her now."

Lady de Burgh did not think of fatigue. Crossing that night she would be at home the next night. She was possessed by a feverish anxiety to get home. To think of Mary and Christopher still in the position of an engaged couple was abhorrent to her. She did not dare think upon Christopher's kisses and caresses. " That way madness lies." She could not endure any delay on the road homeward to put an end to the engagement.

Maurice, unexpectedly practical, while he waited had recovered Bawn's trunk from Euston Station, and, having handed it over to the Sister Portress, was waiting patiently with the taxi till Lady de Burgh should be ready.

Having arranged things for Bawn and her mother and left a sufficient sum of money for their needs, she said good-bye and went out to Maurice and the taxi. The little Sister Portress was greatly agitated at the thought of how the eight-pences were mounting up on the taxi, but Maurice laughed. The hospital was in the wilds. They would have had to walk a considerable way to a station or a 'bus. It was well to be extravagant once in a while.

Looking at his face in the taxi Lady de Burgh was aware of something new in it. He looked very

tired, as though he had been suffering an immense strain and had gained relief. He was very thin and had hollow places in his cheeks, yet he looked cheerful too, although she had a fanciful idea that he was rejoicing fearfully, that he felt he ought not to rejoice.

Something came into her mind. Maurice and Bawn: they would make a beautiful couple. Was it possible that Maurice was taken with Bawn? And if so, could he forgive her the stolen meetings with Christopher, the secret love-affair which had ended so nearly a disaster? What a way out it would be for Bawn! And yet—it was a stupid conventionality which she could put aside if she willed—she did not altogether see Bawn as the social equal of Mary. Maurice was quite different. His family was as old as the De Burghs. Even in the days when he had been employed about the stables she had admired his bearing, his air of race, his manners. He had been a poor gentleman, while Bawn came from peasant stock, though there *might*, nay, there *must* be, good blood somewhere in her.

She had expected protest from Maurice when she told him she was going to take the journey back without a night's rest in bed: but he did not protest. Instead he said that he would accompany her as far as Dublin. He had some business to do there.

He took care of her like a son. After all, she had been a country-mouse for so long that she would have been lost travelling alone. Maurice saw to it that

she had a good lunch: sent her to bed for the afternoon, having put her in charge of a chambermaid who might be trusted to see that the lady had no trouble about packing or anything else. At seven she was called after nearly five hours of sleep: her hot bath was ready. At a quarter to eight there was dinner; at half-past eight they were taking their places in the train, where he had secured her a sleeping compartment.

Everything was made so comfortable for her. All through the journey she found herself thought for, things made easy for her, by Maurice's loving care.

"It is so nice to have a son, Maurice," she said, smiling at him while they breakfasted in the Dublin hotel.

He flushed, looking very happy.

She took out her purse from her handbag. It was a shabby little purse, although it had once been very smart, crushed morocco, with her monogram in pearls in the corner, a gift from her husband long ago. So seldom had she left home of late years that perhaps Sir Hugo had not discovered the shabbiness.

"I must owe you a fearful lot of money," she said. "You have been paying everything for me."

The sides of the little purse lay closely together. Maurice noticed it with a quick throb of tenderness. He did not think there could be very much money in it.

"I have been travelling *de luxe*," she said, opening

the purse, and a little alarm came into her expression.

"Let a son enjoy a son's privileges for once," he pleaded, turning very red.

She looked at him. A swift pang ran through her because of the comfortable fortune the Vicomte had intended for Maurice and the small sum he had been able to leave him.

"I *ought* to have travelled third-class," she said. "Everyone does in England. Bridget and I travelled up to London third-class. And, Maurice, dear—you have not the money, really. Let me pay some now and the rest later. I know it must be a lot."

He laughed and his face cleared.

"I am quite a rich man," he said. "My new brother-in-law is immensely rich. We have been finding out how very rich. There are not only the vineyards. There are also the cattle and the oranges and the peaches. He seems to be a very good man of business, despite his simple ways. He has offered me a salary, despite my inexperience, which takes my breath away. I am going to work like a black to make it up to him. He wants to play a little and I shall have the responsibility."

He saw her into the train for the West, thinking of everything that could be for her comfort, loading her up with books and magazines from the stall, procuring her a luncheon basket, seeing the guard so that she should be looked after on the journey and provided with relays of foot-warmers, for the day was very cold.

At last it was time for him to go. He bent over her like a loving son.

"How can I thank you, dear Maurice? You do know how to take care of people. I have never travelled so comfortably."

"It was so good of you to let me. I shall take the thought of it away with me. And Miss Mary." His face quivered. "I hope she will not suffer. You will tell her that I said good-bye to her?"

"When do you go, Maurice?"

"In ten days from Christmas."

"But you will come back again? It is not a great journey now-a-days."

"Oh, yes," he said, "I shall come back. But I am going to stick hard at it to learn the business. I think Antonio would be glad to leave me in charge. You know his dream is to buy an old place here."

The bell rang. There was a scurrying of late passengers by the carriages and a slamming of doors at the far end of the train. He lifted her hand to his lips.

"I should always come, as fast as train and boat could carry me—if you wanted me, or Miss Mary. Of course I know you are set above wanting me. But . . ."

The guard's whistle blew. He sprang out. "Stand back please," said the porter, slamming the doors. The train began to move. Maurice walked with it to the end of the platform where it began to get up speed.

Lady de Burgh stood up for a last look at him. She had not known that she would feel parting with Maurice so much. The train took a sharp turn and she lost him. A blank loneliness settled down upon her as she sank back in her corner.

CHAPTER XXIII

MARY IS TOLD

MAURICE had telegraphed for her to Sir Hugo.

"Arriving four o'clock. Come to meet me."

On the downward journey she had plenty of time for misgiving as to whether her message was explicit enough. Would her husband understand that she wanted him to meet her? What would she do if Mary and Christopher were on the platform? She wanted her husband's support and guidance. Fortunately, she had no doubt as to how he would take Christopher's transgression. He would be splendidly angry as she loved to see him.

Poor Mary! What a dreadful blow she had to inflict on her darling who had always been so tenderly treated! Was she so set on Christopher that she would look on those who took him from her as enemies? But, no, no; surely no! Mary, the child of many prayers, would not go on caring for a man who had behaved as Christopher had done. And yet—she would not be the first innocent girl, she would not be the last, to find an inexplicable attraction in a sinner. Indeed, it had sometimes

seemed to Elizabeth de Burgh that Mary was torn between attraction and repulsion in her relations with Christopher — the Dark Angel drawing her towards him — the Angel of Light haling her away.

The smoky oil-lamp, swinging in the wind and flaring at the little station, revealed to her anxious eyes the tall soldierly figure of Sir Hugo—alone. If Mary had been there she would have been surrounded by a noisy ring of dogs, jumping and barking. She would have been beside her father, delicious to look at in the fur coat which was one of Christopher's presents. That would have to go too. Poor Mary was going to lose a good many things at one blow. What matter, so the child saved her white soul alive!

She was cold and dull after the journey, and her heart had fallen very low, but her husband's reception of her, as though she were something very precious from which he had been long parted, comforted her. He put her in the warm brougham, leaving Phelim to collect the bag and parcels from the carriage.

"Well?" he said expectantly, as they mounted the hill from the station, "I ought to scold you for making a bee-line back again; but upon my soul I'm glad. 'I don't make out to be a chaperon nohow,' as our prospective American tenant would say. I've written to him again. Tell me about Bawn. Why, where is Bridget?"

"I have left Bridget with Bawn for the time being."

"You came all that way alone? Not that I suppose poor Bridget would have been much of a courier."

"As a matter of fact, Maurice Roche travelled with me to Dublin. He put me into the train at the Broadstone after taking the greatest care of me on the journey. He said he had business in Dublin. I believe his only business was to take care of me."

"Good boy!" said Sir Hugo, in happy masculine unconsciousness of having shown any coldness towards Maurice. "You should have brought him back with you to spend Christmas. He would have been a relief from the lovers."

She shivered a little and he felt it.

"Cold, old lady?" he said; and drew her nearer to him.

She found the caress extraordinarily comforting. It helped her to tell her story, which she did, as a plain unvarnished tale, without any comments.

Except for an exclamation now and again he did not interrupt while she went quickly through to the end. There was not much time.

When she had finished she waited for a second with a strange feeling of suspense. He spoke and her heart lifted. She had not known that there was any doubt in her mind as to how he would take it.

"He leaves my house to-night," he said sternly. "The brougham can take him back to the mail at six o'clock. I shall breathe more freely when he is out of the house."

"The people will talk," she said, thinking of Bawn.

"Let them talk!" he responded. "Probably they have been talking, buzzing with talk about our girl! Good God!"

Looking at his profile in the dim light of the brougham she thought that it was very haggard.

"Good God!" he said again. "Mary! Why should he not have selected some of the smart young ladies who are content to blink at such episodes? Our white ewe-lamb!"

The wife's heart lifted towards him in a passionate tenderness and admiration.

"It is my own fault," he said. "I encouraged Christopher because he was rich: I thought he was a decent fellow. What do riches matter after all? We shall get through our difficulties. Why not go to Gaston's old place, which we should have rent-free for a while? They say the Bretons are like the Irish. You and Mary would be happy among them."

"That might be a good idea," she said, and her heart began to beat fast. She could see the lit windows of the house. How would Mary take it?

"What are you going to do?" she asked, fearfully.

"Get Mary away. I shall tell Christopher to clear out and not come back again. Do you know I have an idea that he is ready? He has had a queer furtive look about him since you went away."

He uttered an expletive very softly under his breath and his wife was not shocked.

Mary ran out to meet them, and flung her arms about her mother.

"You will have tea in your own room, darling," she said; "and I shall come and pour it out for you as you like me to. What an immense journey! And where is Bridget?"

No need to ask where Christopher was. Christopher could be heard knocking about balls in the billiard-room. That he had not come out to welcome her was proof positive that he knew.

The fire was burning brightly in Lady de Burgh's bedroom, and the shaded lamp lit, the old chintz curtains drawn, everything ready for the beloved mistress and lady: and there was Mary drawing off her mother's gloves, helping her off with her furs, kneeling down to unlace her shoes and lift the beloved feet to the warm footstool before the fire.

She jumped up as a maid came in with a tea-tray, set a light to the spirit stove under the brass kettle and went away.

"Now, you darling thing," she said to her mother. "You are not to talk till you have had your beloved cup of tea. Cook has sent up chicken sandwiches and those little fairy cakes you like. You do look done up, pet mother!"

She chattered away happily as she made the tea.

Judy, who had followed them upstairs, lay a black patch on the white skin rug, sighing like the wind in the keyhole, with one melancholy eye ranging between mother and daughter.

Mary's hands as they moved about over the tea-

cups flashed in the firelight. Christopher had covered them with rings, some of them of great value.

She put down the kettle and shot a shy look at her mother.

"My hands feel so cramped in these rings," she said. "They are so hard and new, not like your dear little old rings. Christopher won't know."

She pulled off a handful of rings and laid them in a glittering heap on the mantelpiece. Her engagement ring was among them. It was set with one splendid milky opal surrounded by diamonds. Christopher was not one to think of ill-luck in a stone; and if he had known of the superstition concerning the opal he would have rejoiced in flouting it.

She moved her fingers about as though they had been asleep. Then she poured out the tea. As she brought the cup to her mother she glanced through the unblinded window towards the stable-yard. She could see the two lamps of the brougham shining like the eyes of a great cat in the dark.

"The brougham is there still," she said. "I wonder why they have not taken out the horse."

She brought a little table and set it by her mother's elbow for the tea-cup. Then she sat down on the rug beside Judy and looked up at her mother, one hand absently fondling the dog's head.

"Now I am ready for the mystery of your running off like that," she said—"you who never leave home

—and, coming back all that way by yourself, you who are so precious to your husband and daughter that you are never allowed to make even little journeys alone. And where have you *strayed* Bridget ? What is the matter about Bawn ? I've felt there was a mystery, but I haven't asked. Have I not been good ? I should really qualify for Blue Beard's wife, I am so incurious."

Lady de Burgh put down her cup and saucer, and, reaching out, drew her daughter closer to her. Mary rested her cheek against her mother's knees and was quiet, her eyes looking at the fire. She had always been so responsive to love. So Elizabeth de Burgh wanted her to be. The disconcerting eyes might have hindered the story. She wanted to gain time. It had occurred to her when Mary spoke of the brougham that the interview between her husband and Christopher need not take long. She wanted to keep Mary with her till Christopher was gone. How would Mary take it ? She had known a girl as good as Mary stick to a lover who had acted disgracefully to another girl. But she might be sure of Mary. Mary would find no false excuses for Christopher. She would not put the blame on the girl as that other girl had done. She would pluck Christopher out of her heart, no matter how it hurt. He had not entered Mary's soul. He had reached some external in her. The deeper depths were surely untroubled by his coming and going ! She was the child of many prayers.

" You have been very good not to ask questions, darling," she said. " I always knew I could trust

my Mary. Yes, the trouble has been about Bawn."

"It is so very easy to get into trouble in Spain, darling—for a girl, I mean," Mary said, rubbing her cheek against her mother's skirt. "There was a girl at Roehampton told me you could so easily get into trouble there. I wish now I had told Bawn. This girl knew a girl who had gone as governess to Spain, and they were all so warm and cushiony and kind, and made so much of her, that she thought she was in Heaven. She had had rather a bad time at home, poor dear. And before she could learn their ways a young Spanish gentleman fell in love with her, and just swept her off her feet, and the poor darling had no idea she was doing anything dreadful at all in letting him make love to her. He was in the Spanish army, and he had about eighty pounds a year, so, of course, things did not look very rosy for their marriage; but she was going on the way people do, rather miserable sometimes, and in the seventh Heaven at other times, but without the remotest idea of how the Spaniards would look upon it. Till they discovered it and then it was dreadful. All the kind, stately, soft people. Oh, Mamma—it was just as though she had been really wicked. It nearly broke her heart. She was sent home to her poor mother, who had eight daughters younger than this one; and the young soldier was got rid of some other way. It was a dreadful business. I meant to have told Bawn—only, unfortunately, I missed her in Dublin. I suppose the poor dear has been getting into that sort of trouble.

The Spaniards would think her beautiful skin and blue eyes wonderful. And how would she know, poor Bawn, unless someone told her ? "

" Bawn has not got into trouble in Spain. As a matter of fact, she never went further than London."

" But it is going on for a month since she left ! Where on earth has she been ? Was she not to have travelled with some nuns ? Oh, poor darling ! She was lost then ? But you have recovered her ? "

She scrambled up on to her knees in her anxiety, and, leaning her two elbows on her mother's knees, she gazed into her eyes.

" Bawn has been very ill. She met with an accident in London. Most fortunately she was taken to a hospital—a new place, only just opened, run by Sisters of the Holy Cross. We have been in most dreadful anxiety about her. She could give no account of herself, and the detectives we had employed apparently did not visit the Holy Cross. Maurice Roche found her. He devoted himself to the task, coming up from Oxford to London. The detectives laughed at his way of going about it, but he has found her."

" I *felt* you were keeping something from me," said Mary reproachfully. " You have a very tell-tale face, my little mamma ! But why not have told your daughter ? Of course I understand you did not want it talked of all about the place. Did Christopher know ? "

" I will tell you the whole story, Mary."

She pushed her girl softly into her former sitting attitude on the hearthrug, and, with a hand laid about her neck, she kept Mary's face towards the fire. As she began her story she heard the coachman's voice in the yard speaking to his horse, and wondered if Mary would notice it.

She told the story circumstantially. When she came to Bawn's meeting with Christopher at Euston she faltered a little, substituting for the name "a man Bawn had known before."

Mary turned her head about at that.

"Bawn knew very few people," she said. "I don't think she could have known anyone who was likely to have met her at Euston station."

Was there something of fear in her voice?

"I will tell you," Lady de Burgh said, and went on with the story. As she had heard it from Bawn herself it was fuller in detail than the story Maurice had told. Telling it over now she got into the recital the horror of an innocent girl who is entangled with evil and does not know how to escape from it. She could feel Mary shudder as she told it. And then, after Bawn's escape from the man, there was her peril in the lonely, open space at Finchley.

Mary asked no more questions, but heard the story to the end, trembling against her mother's knee.

"And so I left Bridget to look after Bawn. I don't want Bawn exposed to gossip. We shall be leaving here after Christmas. Your father has decided to let to Mr. Van Brunt, who hankers after Castle Morrogh so much. We are rather poor, Mary;

I have only discovered lately how poor. We shall have to retrench so as to get out of debt. There is the Vicomte's old place in Brittany. We might go there."

Mary drew herself away from the tender hand almost roughly. The action would have been rough in anyone less gentle than Mary. She got to her feet and stood up, very pale, staring at her mother.

"Why do you talk like that?" she cried; and there was the wail of a lost child in her voice. "Why do you talk of Brittany? Do you think I will let you be poor when I am married to Christopher? You are frightening me, mother."

Elizabeth de Burgh in an anguish of pity and love took her child into her arms.

"You must not think of Christopher again, Mary," she said. "He is not fit to be your husband. My poor darling, how I wish I could bear it for you!"

"It was Christopher then?"

"Yes, he was meeting Bawn secretly and making her care for him all that time you were up in Dublin, when he used to go out with his gun. And, after Bawn had escaped him, he came back here and dared to ask for you."

There was a pause as though each listened to the sound of the carriage being driven round from the stable-yard to the front of the house.

"He is going away?" said the poor child, with a sudden sob. "I need not see him again?"

"Your father has been speaking to him. He is going away."

"Don't let anyone come near me. I am going to my own room. Don't let them call me for dinner."

"Very well, my darling."

She left Mary to fight the first shame and anguish of it alone with God.

CHAPTER XXIV

CHRISTOPHER WRITES A LETTER

FORTUNATELY Mr. Van Brunt, who was waiting with what patience he could summon to his aid, "kicking his heels in London," as he put it himself, was only too glad to get possession of Castle Morrogh. In fact he expressed himself as being tickled to death by the prospect of getting in immediately after Christmas, which was now close upon them.

Christopher had gone without any protest. He had, in fact, rather taken the wind out of Sir Hugo's sails by offering no defence of himself.

"I behaved like a blackguard," he said, "first about that child, Bawn O'Connor, second by asking Mary to marry me. I'm an unmitigated cad and scoundrel. You can kick me if you like. And, of course, I'm ready to go. I wish I had never come."

"I wish you never had," Sir Hugo replied gloomily.

"If you don't mind, I'll fetch my belongings," Christopher said. "There's a bag I can easily carry. My man can follow to-morrow with the rest of the things."

Sir Hugo looked at his watch.

"The brougham is standing in the stable-yard," he said. "I told them not to take out the horse. You can have twenty minutes."

"I shall not require nearly so long. I have only got to ring the bell for Sims. I hope it will not inconvenience you my leaving him here for the night."

"Not at all," Sir Hugo answered.

Christopher was gone within the ten minutes. Sir Hugo confessed afterwards to his wife that there had been something grimly humorous about the parting, when they had been so perfectly polite to each other under the curious gaze of the servants, although there had been no handshaking.

"He disappointed me of a good many things I meant to say to him," he said, "but, do you know, Elizabeth? I think he was glad his rascality was discovered. He certainly has not given me the impression of being a happy man during these last weeks. His swagger concealed a carking care—not very well, for it looked out from behind the concealment. As for Mary—I am proud of my girl. Some girls would have given trouble."

"Not Mary—once she knew; but it is a great shock to her."

Sir Hugo could not refrain from showing by his manner to Mary that he was proud of her; but Mary was oblivious of such things. She was oblivious of most things except her own sickness of heart. Her mother understood. She did everything for her, seeing that the trousseau, the ill-fated wedding dress,

were put away out of sight, in a place where Mary would not come upon them by chance. She saw to it that Christopher's barbaric gifts of gold and gems were returned, with the few letters he had written to Mary. When her innocent love-letters came back Elizabeth de Burgh herself placed them in the heart of the fire, and saw them burn unwillingly, as though live things burnt.

She alone guessed at the sickness in the girl's heart, the phantoms and shadows amid which she moved. She saw the dull look of suffering in Mary's eyes, as in the eyes of a bird brought down on the wing. Mary had had a shock. It would be long before she would be the old Mary again. She had a sickness of the whole world of men and women upon her, a sickness of the love which might be a baser thing. Her mother found a homely simile for it. "The world is yellow to Mary," she said; "she has a biliousness of the heart and spirit."

In a sudden flooding wave of compassion she thought of carrying her child away from the curious eyes of the people who had known and loved her from babyhood, whose pity was hard to bear.

"In a trouble like hers," she said, "you must get out of the place where it happened. You must go somewhere where no one knows about your trouble. Presently Mary will be herself again. I shall leave her in Dublin with Agnes Beaumont till we can join her."

"Why not wait till we can all go?" Sir Hugo asked. "It cannot be so hard on her for a few days more. Of course if she must go I daresay Agnes

Beaumont would be very good to her, and she would see so much real trouble with Agnes that perhaps her own would assume its true perspective."

Lady de Burgh looked at her husband with the half-humorous, half-irritated tenderness which was often in her expression when she regarded him.

"I wonder, being a sensible girl, that she doesn't see she's had an escape to be thankful for," he went on serenely. "You should never have asked him here, Elizabeth. You can't be too careful whom you ask to the house when there is a young girl in it."

Lady de Burgh, who was standing by his chair, touched his thick dark hair in a light caress. Of course Hugo would not understand. She forbore to remind him that he had been Christopher's friend and ally. She was accustomed to refrain.

But Mary would not hear of going to Miss Beaumont. She came out of her abstraction to say that she would not leave Castle Morrogh before her father and mother were ready to accompany her. She was so firm about it that her mother yielded with relief. After all, there was a deal to be done before handing over the house to Mr. Van Brunt which required the mistress's presence: and Sir Hugo was always lost without his wife by his side. She had been stifling an anxiety in her heart as to how he would bear the days at Castle Morrogh without her while she was away with Mary. They had been practically inseparable since their marriage, and in even a short absence of hers from the house he was apt to wander

about uneasily, not knowing what to do with himself.

That evening after dinner Mary went to the piano in the old way. She had been slipping away early to bed during the ten days or so following Christopher's departure. All the new songs—the latest London successes, had gone back to Christopher. Only the well-beloved shabby old friends waited on the stand beside the piano to be taken up again.

Her mother watched her with an incredulous hope and pleasure in her eyes. Sir Hugo, smoking his shabby little pipe as he always did in his wife's drawing-room, said comfortably :

" Bravo, Moll ! Give us some of the Melodies."

He said nothing about the new-fangled love-songs from East and West which he had disliked on his daughter's lips.

Mary sang—" Silent, O Moyle ! " and " She is far from the Land," and " Come Rest in this Bosom," and went on to the " Bailiff's Daughter of Islington " and " Since First I saw your Face," and " Robin Adair," while her father's face beamed with gratification. He had a simple love of simple music, and Mary sang like a thrush.

" I knew you were making too much fuss about Mary," he said afterwards to his wife. " A girl of spirit like your daughter does not go on fretting for a bad egg like Christopher."

Of course he did not know of Mary's anguish of tears in her mother's arms after that brave attempt to get outside her own griefs. " I tried, darling, I

really tried," she had sobbed, weeping the flooding tears of youth that penetrated the silk on her mother's shoulder where she had hidden her eyes.

Christmas passed over very quietly. Mary had gone on trying, and had succeeded, to her father's satisfaction, and her mother's misgiving, because the strain of those evenings at the piano was followed by so many tears. Yet the tears were best. In time they would wash away the distaste for life and love which for the moment was poisoning a gentle and joyous heart.

It was not time yet to say—

"All men are not like Christopher."

For the present Christopher's name was best left unsaid.

On Boxing Day there was a letter in Lady de Burgh's place at the breakfast-table addressed in Christopher's large sprawling handwriting, a thick letter.

Fortunately she was down first. She glanced at the cheerful fire before which Judy—not very well in these days—was lying, with a half intention of burying Christopher's big letter in the heart of it. Mary's step outside the door decided her. She stuffed it into the little silk bag in which she carried her keys and handkerchief, instead.

There was a pile of letters which she was turning over when Mary came in, a little pale and with a listless step, but still "trying," with an attempt at a cheerful morning greeting.

"What a lot of letters, Mamma!" she said.

"Yes: here is one from Maurice Roche. I see

he has written to you also. Dear Maurice! We are not to see him again. He leaves earlier than he had expected—the day after to-morrow his boat leaves Liverpool. He says that perhaps in two years' time he may get a holiday and come to see us."

Mary, who had been reading her letter, looked up. She was rather pale.

"To-day I am going to return the—the things people sent. Oh, I can't leave it to you, darling: you do too much. If we are to get out of this, next week, I must help you. Maurice"—she spoke in a stammering hurry—"asks me to keep the ring he sent me. I don't want to keep anything. I want to put it all behind me. You see, I am your own daughter, darling. You always said of a mistake or a sorrow, 'Put it behind you and begin again!' But what am I to say to Maurice?"

"I should keep poor Maurice's ring," Lady de Burgh said. "It would hurt him if you sent it back."

Mary was as good as her word. She busied herself writing many notes and enclosing them with many parcels. She had received a great number of gifts from Christopher's friends and her own. Several had come in since the engagement had been broken off, and had lain on the bed of an unoccupied room waiting for someone to pack them off again to their donors.

Lady de Burgh looked in at Mary on her way along the corridor to her own room. Mary, with a white set face, was going through her task methodically.

There was already a pile of parcels ready for the post.

Her heart ached for the girl. She had an impulse to offer to help her which she rejected. "We have to fight our biggest battles alone," she said to herself; and had a thought of comfort, because Mary's mood was rather one of disillusionment and disgust, it seemed to her, than of grief for the loss of a lover. When Mary emerged from these clouds, would she not have put Christopher behind her for ever?

She felt she could not read Christopher's letter anywhere where Mary might look in on her. It was a beautiful frosty morning. She put on her outdoor things and went down by the path skirting the little stream which ran one side of the garden, out by the wicket-gate, to the seat, in a sunny angle of the wall of the kitchen garden, where the robins came to be fed. It was a favourite seat of hers, but this winter she had not used it much. However, her old pensioners knew her; or they had told their offspring about her; for she was hardly seated before a couple of impudent redbreasts, the harbingers of others, were hopping about her and on to the seat beside her, evidently with an expectation of dainties.

Presently, she told them, she would fetch them some sugar. Meanwhile, secure from other eyes than the birds'—Judy had not followed her as usual, but had turned a sick eye upon her from the hearth-rug—Christopher's letter must be read. She opened it with a fastidious air of holding it away from her.

It began without any sort of prefix. There were several sheets of it, but it did not take much of

Christopher's handwriting to fill a sheet. Here and there was a mis-spelt word. Christopher had never learnt to spell.

"I apologise for troubling you with this letter. I know what you think of me, and it is not a plesant knowledge, but I feel I deserve it. I won't try to make excuses for myself. I am a rotter and I always was a rotter. It's no use saying I'd give my life to undo what I did because you won't beleive me. Rotters don't have such feelings as that. Anyhow, Mary must have put me out of her mind in disgust. I ought to be glad of that but I'm not, being a rotter. My reason for writing to you is to tell you that I want to marry Bawn if she'll have me. I don't know where she is. I had a private enquiry agent, as they call themselves, looking for her before Roche ran her to earth; and I discharged him for his incompetence. I don't want to take him on again. I won't try to make any excuses for my conduct about Bawn—you wouldn't understand. Good women like you don't understand that there is a rotter in a man like me trying to pull whatever of good chap there may be in him over. I'd have married Bawn—I swear I would, but of course you won't beleive me. When I came back I was looking for her. I never meant—so help me God—to have asked Mary. It was some devil in me made me do it and she was so sweet and I think liked me. I leave it to you to tell me or not where Bawn is, and let me find out for myself if she has any love left for me. She didn't want to love me—but she couldn't help it. If she'll have me I'll try to make ammends. It might be the

saveing of me. I know I'm not worth saveing, but still . . ."

Lady de Burgh forgot all about the imploring robins as she read this astounding letter. She read it through a second time. Christopher ready to marry Bawn! She had never thought of Christopher as a possible Lord of Burleigh. Something stung her in the letter. The truth of it leaped at her. Christopher had not even the poor excuse for his conduct to Mary that he had loved her. He had been preoccupied, fitful, during those days of the engagement. Her pride—and she was a very proud woman for herself as well as her child—was outraged. There had been some queer, unholy fascination in Christopher for Mary, and he had responded to it as a man like him was bound to do—perhaps even with an element in it of a desire to score off herself for her cold disdain of him. For a second or two the eyes of peace and kindness saw red. Her child had been hurt: and Christopher had not really cared. She read into his letter whether it was there or not, that he preferred Bawn—the daughter of a peasant woman!

The robins gave up begging till a more propitious moment. One flitted to a bare bough against the blue and white of the sky, and swayed on the branch in the cold sunlight, while he warbled his plaintive sweetness.

Should she—should she not—let Christopher know where Bawn was? It seemed an outrageous thing for him to suggest that she should. Only Christopher would have done it. It did not occur to her

that it was a strange tribute to the woman whom even Christopher perceived to be great.

She sat quietly without moving, long enough for the robins to despair of their usual portion. But she had not forgotten them. She would come again with nuts and sugar and such dainties and the robins would feed out of her hands.

A letter went by the night post telling Christopher where Bawn was to be found.

CHAPTER XXV

JUDY GOES HOME

JUDY was very sick, sick to death. She lay in her basket in Mary's room beside the fire, on her side, her eyes glazed, her coat staring and dreadful.

"Not much hope," said the young vet. who had come twenty miles on his motor-bicycle to pronounce a death-verdict on Judy. "Eight years old. Many dogs die at eight years old. Just as well. They haven't much of a time afterwards."

The boy was painfully conscious of the aspect he must present to Mary's beautiful, unconscious eyes in his hideous oilskins. He wished he had taken them off in the hall; but it was a somewhat lengthy process, and his arrival had been anticipated as eagerly as a doctor's in an hour of need.

"She will hardly live through the night," he said. "You wouldn't like me to . . . ? It is absolutely painless, you know. Just a little on the tongue and she's gone."

"Will she suffer?"

Mary spoke as though her life hung on Judy's. For the moment indeed she was absorbed in the old friend's passing to the extinction of other things.

"I don't think so. She is very low. She will

probably slip away quietly. Poor old dog! I wish I could have done something."

The curly-haired, snub-nosed embarrassed boy who "had a way wid the bastes" the people said, bowed himself out, to remain long enough in Mary's mind as something kind and pitiful at a moment of helplessness. The sense of utter disproportion with which one comes up against the death of an animal bewildered her. What useless suffering if the creature is for ignominious extinction!

> "When through strong pangs, high agonies,
> Life into death breaks and death dies."

Explicable for the human creature, those pangs—but piteously disproportionate to the little life they set free, so far as our half-sight can see it.

"You will not stay up, darling?" Lady de Burgh said, coming into Mary's room about midnight, to find her girl, in her white dressing-gown, feeding the fire bit by bit, as though the quietness of death, even in a dog, must go undisturbed. That kind little Mr. O'Sullivan had said poor Judy would die in a stupor he thought.

"Yes, he was very kind—a dear little man," said Mary, looking down at the dog, whose side heaved for all sign of life, now and again. "But of course I could not go to bed. If Judy were to come back, just before she died—they often do—you would not like her to die in the dark, thinking we had deserted her?"

"You will be very tired, my darling?"

"I shall make myself a cup of tea during the night.

Celia has left me the tray. I have a very interesting book to read."

Elizabeth de Burgh went away, unwillingly. She would have liked to share Mary's vigil, but Sir Hugo would not have permitted it. He would probably have vetoed Mary's sitting-up if he had known. He was going hunting in the morning, and the meet was at some considerable distance. Since he was to come in for the hunt breakfast at General Moore's hospitable house he would leave early in the morning, so as to give Grania, his new hunter, a very gentle and fiery little mare, her time. He had retired early to bed. Sometime during the day he had spoken a phrase or two over Judy that might have been her funeral panegyric.

"She never hurt or harmed anyone in her life," he had said, forgetting that short period of Judy's running amok. "She was a good little dog at her work and as true as steel."

When he said it Judy had travelled back from some considerable distance to wag a loyal tail, and had immediately gone away again.

"Better put her out in one of the box-stalls to-night," he had said. "She won't fret for anything more in this world. A sick dog is not very healthy in a bedroom."

He had gone off, taking it for granted that his daughter would obey, and had not thought about it further. It had never occurred to him that in non-essentials he was not always obeyed.

No, indeed; Judy was not going to die alone in the dark. There was nothing to do for her. The

drops of brandy in milk, the chicken-broth, which they had been forcing on poor Judy before the little vet. came were laid aside.

"It is cruelty to trouble her," he had said. "She will not require anything more in this world."

The little saucepan by the fender in which Judy's milk had been warmed, which had not been taken away, was a mournful object in Mary's eyes, like the things belonging to the dead from which the living turn away with a groan.

She had her book, but she did not read. Her mind kept wandering about over many things. It was tired and yet alert. She turned from the consideration of Christopher with a chill distaste. Somehow in the quiet pauses of the night, beside the dying friend, the thought of Christopher seemed a discordant and painful intruder. The Vicomte—how sorry he would have been for Judy! Maurice—these friends were more in keeping. She had a fanciful idea that the spirit of the Vicomte might be present at the deathbed of his favourite. She looked about her with an absurd half-expectation of seeing the fine smile, the little black moustache, the delicate features and bright eyes of the Vicomte somewhere in the shadows.

Of course, they were not there. It was absurd. There was a little wind in the room from the open lattice-window behind the heavy curtain. That window looked into the wood. The wood road it overlooked ran straight to the vault of Hilary de Burgh who had had a fancy for being buried in his wood rather than in consecrated ground. She remembered a maid-servant who had seen an impal-

pable vapour, which she knew to be the spirit of Sir Hilary, enter by that window. Mary had slept in the room undisturbed through her girlhood. She was peculiarly unafraid, more like a boy than a girl in that way, her mother had said.

She went and drew back the curtain to admit the air into the room. It was moonlight—all the long ways of the wood were clear in moonlight. An eccentric, scientific, nineteenth-century De Burgh had set a vane on Sir Hilary's vault. It turned now in the wind and she thought she caught a glint of light on its surface.

She sat down at the writing-table by the open window and began a letter to Maurice. He seemed about the only person she could write to in the circumstances. She wanted to tell him that she would keep his ring since he wished her to; to tell him about Judy; and about their going away to Kerval. She had a feeling, sitting down to write to Maurice, that he was an old friend long estranged, or at least estranged for a time, and that the letter was an act of reconciliation.

She told him many things in that letter. The letter expanded as though she had a great many things to tell which she had been holding back.

"You should have come to see us before you left," she wrote. "It will be a long time now till we can meet. To see Judy dying is to realise the value of friends. One wants to keep *all* one's friends as long as one can."

When she had signed the letter and placed it in its envelope she remembered that she had not

Maurice's Californian address, so placed the letter in the little glass-fronted box on the table, with a slit for letters to be posted.

She read a little with an aloof mind. Then, finding that she was taking in nothing, laid aside the book and made herself some tea.

The night wore on. From time to time she replenished the fire. Judy was very quiet, as the little vet. had foretold. Only the heave of her side now and again showed that she was alive. Once Mary stooped and stroked the disordered coat. Judy looked at her with blind eyes and made a feeble attempt to wag her tail: her heart was still within reach of her mistress. It hurt—and Mary did not try again. The memory of that attempt to wag the tail was to cost her a pang when she remembered it for many a day.

She sat looking into the heart of the fire, thinking, till, unconsciously to herself, the thoughts became shapeless, broke, and wandered off into confusion. She shook herself awake. Was this how she was going to watch by the dying friend so that the little spirit should not go out alone into the darkness?

She tried to read, but again the book failed to grip her mind and she laid it down. She was very sleepy and she knew it. She tried leaning out into the damp air from the open window, drawing long breaths of it into her lungs.

That succeeded for a time—but as the night turned round towards morning she slept.

A piercing and terrified howl from Judy awoke her. The lamp was smelling and the fire low. Judy had

dragged herself up in the basket to utter that melancholy cry. Her blind eyes were staring before her —her coat bristling. The howl died off into silence as Mary dropped on her knees by the basket and laid her hand on the little head. Judy fell over heavily to one side. She stretched her limbs as though she were racing, and lay very still. The room was suddenly cold.

Something seemed to pass in the air with a swift rush. There was a faint whimper, or Mary thought there was—the birds perhaps in the eaves.

Suddenly she realised that the clock was striking in the hall downstairs. She had hardly become conscious of it before it ceased striking. Then she had a sudden idea that it had been striking when she awoke, and through that last pang and terror which had launched Judy's spirit from its earthly tenement.

Absurd! She was nervy of course. She glanced at the little china clock on the mantelpiece ticking away cheerfully. Three o'clock. She must have had a delusion about the striking of the clock downstairs. Of course, she was not nervy! She *could* not be afraid of the poor dead friend, already assuming the dreadful look of rigidity. But while she said it she felt that she could not stay in the room. She must have comfort and companionship. Pity broke upon her like a wave—the pity of it, that the King of Terrors must so visit the humble and the gentle. She whispered a prayer for pardon to Judy that she could be afraid. Then she stole from the room with a trembling heart.

Outside her door the long corridor, which somebody

had said was like a cloister, stretched away to her mother's room at the other end of the house. Midway the corridor widened to a central hall with pointed windows, one below, one above filled in with coloured glass, on which was the stag with the cross between its antlers that appeared in the coat-of-arms of the family. That centre space, by closing a couple of doors, divided the corridor and made a room, off which five doors opened. In the lower window a lamp burned before a little shrine. It was comforting; it was friendly. By its aid she got to her mother's door without open panic.

Lady de Burgh awakened at the sound of the door opening. From an inner room the sound of Sir Hugo's snoring came reassuringly.

"Is it you, Mary?"

"Judy is dead."

Suddenly she burst into tears.

"Poor Judy, she has escaped old age and the sadness that means to a dog. Come in here, child. There is plenty of room for both of us in this great bed. Stay—close the door of the dressing-room, softly so as not to waken your father."

Mary obeyed. She undressed and crept into bed beside her mother, bringing with her, if but she had known it, a sweet sense of comfort and companionship. The mother turned to her with a tenderness like that she had felt when Mary lay on her arm in that bed twenty years ago, a downy-headed baby, smelling sweetly of fresh linen and delicately scented powder, with as yet only a need for milk and sleep.

They whispered together a while and Mary slept—with the tears on her cheeks.

Elizabeth did not sleep. She was very wakeful. She heard hour after hour strike, until about six o'clock when her husband was stirring in the dressing-room. She heard him plunge into his bath and the noise he made moving about in the water, and then he was out, and scrubbing himself dry making a noise between his teeth like that which a groom makes when he grooms a horse.

He would not pass through her room lest he might wake her. He was considerate in those ways; and would go down by the other door that opened on the corridor, make his cup of tea over the spirit lamp without disturbing the house, and ride off before anyone stirred.

A queer compassion for him awakened in her heart as she heard those sounds of him beyond the door of the inner room. She remembered that he had said his cup of tea was generally slop, because he had not waited to be sure the water boiled. And the last time he went hunting his flask had been forgotten, his sandwich case left unfilled because the servants had been out at "The Mission" the night before and had forgotten those mundane things.

He was whistling now very gently, the "Modereen Rue"—the Little Red Fox.

She slipped out of bed quietly, so as not to awaken Mary. She made a hasty toilette to be supplemented later. Sir Hugo always took some time in getting into his hunting togs. By the time she came downstairs the groom was leading the mare up and down

in front of the house. A solitary candle was lit on the hall table. It was raining a little; and an ominous wind had got up and rumbled in the chimneys and shrieked outside the windows.

She was in the dining-room when Sir Hugo came. The lamp was lit, and the kettle over the spirit lamp just on the boil; his flask and sandwich case lay ready. The fire, which had not gone out overnight, had been stirred to a blaze and replenished, so that the room was warm.

Sir Hugo looked splendid in hunting togs. If his red coat was stained and discoloured, his breeches were pipe-clayed as white as Phelim, who would not let anyone else touch them, could make them. His top-boots shone like a mirror.

Her heart swelled with love and pride in him. He uttered a pleased exclamation when he saw her.

"Hello, old lady!" he said. "This *is* good of you—but, won't you be very tired?"

"You won't have many more hunting mornings," she said. "You should waken me. I don't like your going out uncomfortably."

She made the tea. He drank a steaming hot cup, and rewarded her by saying that he never got a cup of tea like that when he made it for himself.

She went to the door with him to see him off. Contrary to his custom he came back to kiss her and tell her to lie down again till the servants were up and breakfast ready, so that she should not be tired for the day. Then he mounted his horse and rode off into the darkness.

It was well worth while, she said to herself, as the

sound of the horse's hoofs died off in the distance, to have got up a little earlier—she had given Hugo such manifest pleasure. She remembered the good hunting mornings long ago when she and he had gone off together in the morning darkness; and she sighed as she went back upstairs and lay down beside Mary, staring with wide-open eyes at the patch of light cast by the altar-lamp on the ceiling, till she fell asleep.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE TWO MARYS

Mary woke to broad daylight. The blinds had been pulled up and the windows opened wide. A fire was burning in the room. Her little white woollen dressing-jacket was at her hand, and beside her bed was her breakfast tray and her mother waiting to help her.

"Breakfast in bed!" she exclaimed. "Why this spoiling, darling?"

Then she remembered.

"Oh, of course," she said. "Poor little Judy! It was heartrending, Mamma. It was almost as though she was dreadfully frightened."

"I know. I have seen a dog die. Judy is at rest. Now, don't talk about it, but sit up and have your breakfast. Here are some of the very last grapes for you; your own little Sicilian Buttercup has laid her first egg; and the tea is just as you like it."

"How good you are to me!"

Mary got up, washed her face and hands, and brushed her hair out in a shimmering mass of red gold before she would have her breakfast. Scrambling back into bed, where her mother propped her up with pillows, ready to feed her daintily as though

she was the child of old needing to be coaxed to eat when the weather was hot and muggy, she remarked that she would feel quite happy if she thought Judy had found the Vicomte. Then she proceeded on a train of speculation such as had often shocked her governesses and had set Canon O'Flanagan, when he had visited them, to laughing heartily when he was out of range of Mary's serious eyes.

"I believe I really felt Judy's little soul go by me at the moment she died," said Mary. "Such a gentle little thing flitting by in the dark! What have they done with poor Judy?"

"You shall see, darling. They have made a grave for her just by the laurustinus bush, close to your own little garden. I told them not to cover it up till you had seen Judy for the last time."

So when Mary had finished her breakfast she went to her room to dress and found it all neat and in order; but they had forgotten to take away Judy's collar which lay forlornly in a corner, and its poignant reminder of Judy made her weep while she dressed and did her hair.

Afterwards—the day had got up mild and sunny—they stood by Judy's grave, and looked down at the rigid little figure, still in the attitude of hunting, lying on its side in the grave, which someone had thought to line with a few branches of the scented walnut-tree that overhung the spot. Mary took a few more branches and laid them over the dog and they went away, Elizabeth de Burgh saying that now Judy was gone Mary was to put it behind her, so that when greater griefs came she might be able

to put them behind her and go on bravely and never look back.

"And, for the matter of that, child, do not look forward," she said. "Do the thing that comes to your hand to-day. Give God to-morrow and yesterday."

There was a great deal to be done in these last days. It was not only the going away for so long a period of time, which necessitated their taking many things; but there was the destruction of many letters and the accumulation of years of small things which must be destroyed or put away, so that drawers and cupboards and such receptacles should be ready for the incoming tenants. Mr. Van Brunt, who had a very fashionable young daughter-in-law keeping house for him while his son ran the business in America, proposed, as he said, to entertain some. They had been warned of a coming invasion of Mr. Van Brunt's servants, but Lady de Burgh had been spared the pain of discharging her old servants, since the new tenant had been generously willing to take them on.

Keogh was going with them. He was accustomed to valeting Sir Hugo and he could turn his hand to pretty well anything. Lady de Burgh looked on him as a plank on the waters of the world into which they were going, a bit of home and friendliness in the strange country. Though she said nothing to Mary she hankered after Bridget. With Keogh and Bridget Kerval would not be wholly exile, and, doubtless, in time she would know the Breton peasants, whom now she only remembered as handsome

and picturesque creatures, with an extraordinary faith side by side with much superstition, full of romance and poetry.

Perhaps, she said in her secret heart, Bridget would come later. Bridget and Bawn could not go on endlessly living together. Bawn must find something to do or—there was the incredible alternative, the knowledge of which she had hidden away in her own breast.

Mary wandered in and out restlessly while her mother was busy. The unrest was a new symptom. Could it be that on the edge of a new life Mary was excited? The mother did not ask. She had the invaluable quality of being able to let things alone. Bawn's name had not been mentioned between them since the revelation. She had no idea of how Mary regarded Bawn. So it was startling when Mary said:

"You will be lost without Bridget. How am I ever going to make up to you?"

"Dear child!" the mother said tenderly. And then in a different tone: "How are you getting on with your packing, darling?"

"Oh, well, you see, I haven't much to put away. Celia is helping me: and I've given her a lot of things I shan't want. You don't mind, do you, Mamma? I've been thinking—will you let the wedding dress go to the Convent, where three novices are going to be received? It will save the poor things buying one dress. Afterwards, they will make the silk into vestments. So it will come to an honourable use."

"Certainly, darling, if you wish it."

"I should not like to keep it," Mary went on, "nor any of the other things. I want to get rid of them all. Let Bawn have them. We are much the same figure, except that she is a little fuller. They can be let out where they need it."

Did Mary know? Was it some strange magnanimity or some strange scorn?

Mary's limpid eyes looked at her mother and there was less shadow in them than there had been.

"I was hoping that, in time, you might wear some of the things yourself—those with no particular association. They are too fine for Bawn."

The thought came to her that they might not be too fine for Bawn, and she stopped short.

Mary had sat down on her mother's bed. She got up now and said, with compunction:

"You are not to wear yourself out packing. You sit down while I fold the things and put them away. What a wicked daughter I am to let my poor mother do all the hard work!"

"A darling daughter."

She allowed herself to be put with gentle force into a chair, while Mary, with a young energy, in a whirlwind way very different from her mother's deliberation, went on packing the folded articles into the trunk.

"You do it while I am thinking of it," said Lady de Burgh.

Mary looked up at her suddenly.

"I wish Christopher would marry Bawn," she said. "It would save . . . my self-respect. I should not feel so horribly . . . ashamed."

The luncheon bell rang and they went downstairs together. Lady de Burgh was debating within her own mind whether she should tell Mary about Christopher's letter. Her Mary! What a character it was! And to think her pearl had been cast before . . . She turned from the strong language, even in thought, fastidiously. No, she could not tell Mary —*yet*. It was too soon. It was true that she herself could not detest Christopher as she had detested him. He was not all libertine. But—it was too soon to tell Mary how completely Christopher had put her behind him. The knowledge in her own mind that Mary had set her innocent lures to attract Christopher, that she had let him see she was to be won, that the winning was easy, made her sore in her pride, in her love. She could not yet bless Christopher's marriage with Bawn. There were limits to tolerance.

She was very busy and she saw nothing of Mary between lunch and tea-time. Sir Hugo usually got back about tea-time, although occasionally he had stopped at a house on the way home and been later. During all her preoccupation she was aware of Mary's restlessness. She heard the light foot up and down the stairs, along the corridor. Well, it was natural that Mary should be restless. After a time there was a shrill barking of dogs and a closing of the great hall door, which sent a shock through the house when it slammed. She looked from her window and saw Mary, bareheaded, her scarlet Connemara cloak wrapped about her, going down the front avenue, over the little bridge which spanned the lake where the wild duck were quacking furiously.

Mary came in about tea-time and proceeded to make the tea, throwing her cloak on to the settle in the hall. The rain-drops were sparkling on her hair and her colour was bright. A couple of wet dogs, who had been doing the forbidden thing and going into the lake after the duck, stretched themselves before the fire and steamed.

"Papa not in yet?" Mary asked, sweeping a glance around her as though she would peer into the shadows beyond the arch.

"No. We had better not wait for him. He may have ridden home with Sir George and gone into Drangan to see Lady Butler and say good-bye.

"When I was a young married woman," said Lady de Burgh, sitting down in the winged chair by the fireside, "and could not go hunting with your father, I used to suffer untold anguish when he was not home by tea-time. I used never to take into account the many things that might detain him. At last he set out to cure me of that extreme nervousness. He stayed out deliberately sometimes without giving me any warning. It hurt in the doing, but it succeeded. There was one thing about your father, of course, that he was always fit to ride his horse, not like some gentlemen I could name. Still, I was afraid, so I took to going out with him. I came to appreciate how little the one who is out can understand the terrors of the one who is at home."

"Poor little Mother!" said Mary. "And you had no little daughter to comfort you."

"I had after some years; but you were a baby. When I was really frightened I did not dare to go to

the nurseries, for Bridget would have known I was frightened ; and when you have those kind of terrors, unnecessary terrors, you always want to hide them in your own breast."

She sipped the hot cup of tea Mary had brought her and went on in a gentle voice as though she were seeing the old days before her.

" I had some dreadful times in the disturbed days," she said. " Your father was a very good landlord, but when he thought that the tenants wanted more than they should get he resisted them. That was a terribly painful time, to see scowls on the faces that had been so friendly. The poor people, they did not know their friends. It was a *débâcle*, and the good suffered with the bad. Your father would not have police protection. He would not stay at home any more than usual. They stopped the Hunt more than once, but he went on hunting ; and when there was a threat that they would poison the hounds he went right into the middle of one of their big meetings and on to the platform and told them what he thought of the threat : some cheered him, but some were sullen."

She went on talking of the old times. Keogh came presently to take away the tea-table. Lady de Burgh referred to him in a way which showed how far she had been Irishised.

" Was that the day Mr. Duigenan was shot at the Fair Cross ? "

" It was, my Lady. I remember it well. Bride Doyle brought home the story, and we were all on our knees in the servants' hall, sayin' the Rosary

that the master might come home safe an' not take the road those villains went."

"So!" Lady de Burgh went on, "I was sitting here just as we are now. We were expecting the Vicomte next day, with a French editor who wanted to inquire for himself into the cause of the Irish Land trouble. I was sitting here alone with the dogs. Fortunately they had not told me about poor Mr. Duigenan. It came on a very wet night, with the rain beating against the windows and a high wind. Your father had said he would be home by five o'clock. When he did not come I began to feel anxious. No one came near me, and seeing how friendly Irish servants are that in itself was enough to give me a creepy feeling. I went up to the nursery once and found you asleep, and Bridget in one of her queer moods when she would not speak, so that I very soon returned to my lonely vigil. Old Ranger was lying by the fire—he was alive then and for a couple of years after. He was very uneasy, getting up and going to the door, and whining, and lying down again, only to repeat the performance. I suppose he knew they were uneasy downstairs. Dogs always do know.

"The time went slowly, slowly, round to eight o'clock. I had time to get terrified beyond all words. Yet I would not show it. There was one bit of comfort I clung on to. It showed how disturbed I was. The clock over there had not struck for a death. You know the old story—ridiculous! Christians should not believe such things. Well, Keogh came to ask if I would have my dinner—it was eight

o'clock—or wait for the master. I said I would wait. Just then we heard the galloping of a horse. 'God help us all!' said Keogh, and ran to the door and opened it. I stood here, clasping the arms of this chair. I wonder I did not die. And—after all—in came your father, safe and sound. His horse had gone lame. He had to walk him five miles to Sir John Brown's, where he got another."

Mary was listening—hearing what her mother said, subconsciously—her finer ear listening through the rain and the wind which was getting up, for the sound of the mare's feet.

She was certainly very uneasy. She picked up a book on the table only to put it down again. She drew her work-basket to her, threaded a needle with embroidery silk, put a stitch or two in the altar frontal she was making, and laid it down again. She complained that Keogh had heaped the fire too high, and her mother answered placidly that her father would come in wet and be glad of a big fire. She fidgeted so quietly that Lady de Burgh was hardly aware of it. To the girl's own mind the Mary who was sitting there, commenting now and again on her mother's talk, was different from the Mary who was listening with the ears of a hare for a sound outside. In a detached way she saw the peaceful interior of the hall, with the two figures there by the shaded lamp and the firelight, without seeming to have any part in it.

The clock struck six. When it began she looked round at the clock-face with terror in her heart. Would it go on? It did not, but ceased with the sixth husky stroke. Absurd that she should have expected

anything else! She had only fancied she had heard it go on striking in the darkness of the silent hours. Her nerves had been upset because of her vigil by the dying dog.

Her mother was right. Such beliefs were not for Christians. What influence *could* a man-made thing like a clock have over human life and death? It was a folly for the credulous, the ignorant.

Suddenly her mother paused.

"There is something coming," she said, and stood up, the long folds of her tea-gown falling about her. "It is a carriage, is it not? Not your father."

Mary ran to the door. She too had heard plainly the sound of the carriage wheels. She opened the door in the teeth of the wind and rain. She saw a dog-cart standing on the gravel sweep, its lamps lighting up the wet ground, sending long shafts of light along the horse's back and on into the blackness. Someone was getting down slowly and painfully, coming up the steps. The light from the hall shone on the face of Sir George Butler.

"I am sorry, Miss Mary," he said huskily. "I have bad news. There has been an accident. Where is your mother?"

"Hugo is dead," Lady de Burgh said, coming to the door.

"He was found on the road two hours after he had left us. Something must have frightened the mare and she threw him. He never spoke."

Mary noted it as a curious thing that Sir George suddenly sobbed. There were surely two Marys. Papa had not seemed to care for Sir George Butler

nor Sir George for him. Yet he sobbed, and it was odd to hear an elderly gentleman sob.

"They are bringing him home," he said. "I came on to prepare you."

"That was very kind," said Lady de Burgh, speaking in quite an ordinary voice. "Won't you sit down, Sir George?"

CHAPTER XXVII

MARY GIVES A BLESSING

For a long time after Mary had a nightmare memory, never quite distinct, of that home-coming of her father and the days that followed.

Mr. Van Brunt did not get possession of Castle Morrogh quite as soon as he had hoped, but he was a kind-hearted gentleman, and he did not worry them, being only too well content that the heir, who seemed to take no interest in his dead cousin's widow and daughter, was willing to allow him to go on at Castle Morrogh according to the old agreement. He was very sympathetic indeed with the poor women who seemed so curiously friendless and whose monetary affairs were left in so bad a way. He did his best, assisted by Mr. Farrell, the county-town solicitor who had charge of the late Sir Hugo's law business, to induce the widow to make the best of a bad business and not be so eager to give up to the creditors things which no one could grumble at her keeping. Mrs. Van Brunt, junior, thought it downright feudal of Lady de Burgh to strip herself of personal possessions, such as jewellery, for the sake of the creditors; and added her cheerful shrewd influence to that of her father and Mr. Farrell.

However, Lady de Burgh persisted—and in the result practically all the debts Sir Hugo had left behind him were settled. When she went out of Castle Morrogh for the last time—young Mrs. Van Brunt, who had taken a great fancy to her, looked at her in wistful protest when she talked of the last time—no one would have a right to blame Sir Hugo's memory or hers.

She had stripped herself bare, and Mary had helped her. It was splendid but insane, said Mr. Farrell. They would not have fifty pounds a year to live on between them, and the place they were going to was just an old tower on the French coast, he believed. It was suicide, so it was. However, if people would commit that sort of suicide there was no law to restrain them. To which Mr. Van Brunt assented sorrowfully, adding that he hoped the ladies would come to a better frame of mind and let their friends help them on a bit.

"If they'd allow me to invest their money for them," he said, with a solemn wink at Mr. Farrell, "I could promise them better returns than they'll ever get from these railroads of yours. We wouldn't call them roads in America. Just tracks; and you'd get there as soon walking."

February—the first week of the changing month—saw the Hegira. Keogh went with them. Lady de Burgh had told him that she could not keep to the arrangement with him, since she would not be able to pay his wages, and Keogh had answered her:

"Hasn't my home been with your Ladyship these

thirty years back, and is it homeless you'd be lavin' me at my time of life ? ''

To which argument there was no answer ; so Keogh went with them, to Lady de Burgh's great but unspoken comfort.

Kerval was indeed a gloomy-looking pile enough as seen from the outside. The first glimpse of it against sky and tossing water reminded them of the old Fitzmaurice ruin on the cliffs above Castle Morrogh. But of course it was not a ruin, and within it was far more cheerful than its forbidding outer aspect suggested. Its open court had four old fruit trees growing. The yellow pears and apples in their season would be ready to the hand to pick, luscious morsels which melted in the mouth. A fig-tree trained against the walls was heavy every autumn with purple fruit ; and there would be apricots and peaches, as the old Bretonne, with frilled lace cap and long earrings, assured them. Now all was bare, but very soon the spring would come, and the courtyard be beautiful with bloom : the hollyhocks and lupins that grew in the somewhat arid-looking beds would be gorgeous when the summer came. Meanwhile the winter storms were nearly at an end. Madame and Mademoiselle would be *très contente* when the spring came.

Meanwhile there were pleasant things. The big kitchen with its glass screen in front opened on the courtyard, and the pots and pans, the casseroles, the dishes of brown and green ware, were all sweet and shining. The tiled floor of the kitchen was spotless in its black and white squares. Jeanne Merlan had

been preparing a meal for their arrival, and to the weary travellers there was something not altogether cheerless in this home-coming. What though the *salon* fire smoked!—that would remedy itself in a day or two. The chimneys were, *naturellement*, a little damp. Shamefacedly Mary acknowledged to herself that Kerval was much better than she had dared to hope, and well worth exploring. The house ran round four sides of the courtyard. There were a great many rooms, all weather-tight, which was something to be grateful for.

After the meal she insisted on her mother's resting in front of the fire, which had begun to burn up. The iron basket on the open hearth burnt logs—ships' timber, resinous and tarred—and once it had caught and the chimney could be coaxed to good behaviour it burnt beautifully. Lady de Burgh acknowledged that she was tired. Mary found a pillow for her head and a duvet to cover her feet before going on a voyage of exploration round the house. Sir Hugo's old setter, Shot—Mrs. Van Brunt, junior, had eagerly offered hospitality to the other dogs with an intention of luring their owners back from time to time—but Shot with his eyes full of a profound haunted melancholy could not be left—Shot went with his mistress on her voyage of discovery.

Without the dog Mary would have been a little nervous of all the empty rooms, their alcoved beds smelling mustily. She was glad that someone, the Vicomte perhaps, had fitted up a couple of rooms opening into each other with plain British bedsteads,

and wire and hair mattresses. She was a little frightened of the gilt catafalques in some of the rooms.

As she went on it was borne in upon her that Kerval contained some very beautiful furniture. A strange thing to find here in this mediæval castle overlooking the sea! The great chandeliers, the gilt furniture, the needlework and tapestry were beautiful and good. She began to feel an interest in Kerval. She was glad they might live among these things with the dignity of old. She had been feeling that they had "come down in the world"; but the phrase or the thing had no terrors for her. She had only dreaded it for her mother, whose stately presence would have been out of keeping with poor and ugly surroundings.

It took quite a long time to go round the house; and she returned full of small excitements to her mother. Lady de Burgh was taking her sorrow in a great way. The counsels she had given to Mary she practised. "Always keep your sorrows between yourself and God," she had said. "The world is sad enough without the addition of your burden."

Therefore she had put on no heavy widow's weeds. She had a sufficient number of black dresses in her wardrobe to prevent what she called the barbarous expenditure on mourning. As far as possible she turned a bright face to the world, though she was not always successful in keeping the desolation out of her candid eyes.

On the way downstairs Mary paused in the corridor by an open window—she had been opening windows all over the house, letting in the sea wind, and caught

snatches of conversation between Keogh and Jeanne. They were very fluent, considering that neither knew each other's language—however, that would remedy itself presently, for, obviously, a lesson had begun, an object lesson. Mary leant further out to hear, unobserved.

Jeanne : " Théière."

Keogh : " Tayer—taypot."

Jeanne : " Ah, merci—té-pote. Coquetier ! "

Keogh : " Cock-a-jay. Bedad, that's the best I ever heard for an egg-cup. Egg-cup."

Jeanne : " Aig-coop."

Keogh : " Not coop. That's where you rares the chickens. Cup. C.u.p."

Jeanne : " Ah, merci, Monsieur, que vous êtes bien gentil ! "

Mary went on, smiling to herself over this little tit-bit with which to cheer her mother's sad heart. Presently she was going to wake her up to a cup of tea which Keogh would know how to make as it pleased her.

She peeped into the *salon*, opening the door noiselessly. Before she could go out again her mother called.

" Come in, my darling, there has been a post. There is something I want to show you."

Mary entered obediently and sat down on a tabouret by her mother's couch, looking inquiringly at the open sheet of paper in her mother's hand.

" You have heard from Bridget ? " she asked.

Her mother looked at her wistfully.

"Darling," she said. "There is something I have been waiting to ask you. It is about Christopher. I have been longing to know if you are unhappy about Christopher?"

The colour came to Mary's face hotly, and ebbed away again.

"I do not think I have any feeling about Christopher except that I am ashamed," she said, with a quiver of her lip. "At least, that feeling has been so strong as to push out others. I am trying to put Christopher and being ashamed behind me, as you said. It will be easier here than at Castle Morrogh. I wish Christopher would marry Bawn. I don't suppose he would—but I wish he would. What is Bridget's news?"

"Perhaps Christopher is better than we thought him. He went straight from us in December to ask Bawn to marry him. She would not see him. Bridget writes——"

She held the letter to get the light on it and read:

"He wouldn't be said no to by me; and he had to get a message from my child that she would not see him. He looked down-like when I told him and put out. 'Tell her,' said he, before goin' off with himself, 'that I'm ready to marry her if she'll take me—it's a quare way,' says he, 'to be sending a message to say the like. If she changes her mind she'll let me know to this address,' and he flung down a card.

"Well, my Lady, he looked mortal bad. I'd have

given him the rough side of my tongue only for I seen I'd be just talkin' to a deaf man. 'Very well, sir,' says I, 'I'll spare you my opinion of your conduct, and I'll give my girl your message. I may as well tell you that it's killin' her on account of Miss Mary. She loves the ground Miss Mary walks on; and to think she, Bawn O'Connor, would be the one to make mischief between Miss Mary and her sweetheart.' 'For God's sake don't talk about that,' said he, gettin' very red. 'But, anyway,' says he, 'Miss Mary's took no hurt. She never loved me,' says he."

"There's another sheet," Lady de Burgh said, taking a second sheet from under the pillow.

"I pray God it may be true, my Lady, for my child never lifted her head, and if Miss Mary was to send a word to her it might save her. The doctor has a bad report of her and Sir Christopher came again yesterday, and he says, marry her he will, if she was a dying girl. But he says she won't die, for he'll take her away to where she'll get the sun all the year round; and, my Lady, you and Miss Mary'd forgive him if you could see his face when he looks at Bawn, for I can't keep him from her. I think my poor child loves him well, and he keeps on prayin' for a quick weddin' and he to take her away; and, my Lady, he's given up Parliament for her and I believe would give up the world for her.

"My best respects to your Ladyship and Miss Mary; and my heart's sore for a sight of you both.

"Your respectful servant,

"Bridget O'Connor."

When she had finished reading she looked at Mary, a wistful question in her eyes.

"How did it come?" asked Mary.

"It was sent to Castle Morrogh and forwarded."

Mary stooped and picked up Bridget's envelope which had fallen to the floor.

"Oh, the poor things!" she said. "It has been three days on the way. I suppose one *can* send a telegram from here? I could write afterwards."

"I suppose it might be possible."

"Come with me, darling. It will do you good and I shall want you to help me. Your grand manner, you know, always procures us quick and respectful service."

Two bright spots of colour had come into Mary's cheeks. Her eyes were shining. She seemed moved by an excitement almost joyous.

"Very well, dear, I will come."

They went across the dunes, finding resemblances to home all the way, except that the climate seemed to be much dryer. The village was like an Irish village, in that all the women were talking from their doors and windows; the fishermen, magnificent creatures, were trolling love-songs in deep rich voices as they came up the street from the sea, carrying silver fish suspended by the gills; the children dipped prettily with a shrill "Bonsoir, mesdames!"; the people were handsome and picturesque. At the post-office they were very anxious to please. All those they met seemed to look at them with a respectful sympathy.

At last Lady de Burgh succeeded in explaining the matter of the telegram. It had not happened before

in the village for many years that anyone should wish to send a telegram—and to England—mon Dieu!

"What am I to say?" she asked, turning to her daughter.

"Please may it be from me?"

"Yes, child, if you will."

"Let it be to Bawn. Say 'All happiness to both, Mary de Burgh.'"

The message was sent. They returned to the village where the people made them respectful salutations and greetings. Over the sea the sky was breaking into glorious masses of crimson and orange light. Their tower stood up black against it. It was going to be a very beautiful sunset. Momentarily it climbed and deepened, cloud after cloud taking fire.

"I wonder how Bridget and Jeanne will get on together," said Mary.

CHAPTER XXVIII

WHO GOES HOME ?

LIFE went by very quietly at Kerval. There was no society except that of the Curé, a brisk little man who had a wide parish and was kept incessantly busy attending to its needs, to whom this coming of the two *dames Irlandaises* ready to help in all manner of ways was something to thank the Mother of God and St. Anne for. Mary, he dubbed playfully, his *vicaire.* They took over the keeping of his little church ; they organised his choir ; they became the friends and helpers of the village in sickness and health.

At Kerval life was not sad as they had feared. Spring and summer were beautiful. There were so many things to interest, the pilgrimages, the *pardons*, the processions, the Blessing of the Sea, the fêtes. Inland from the village stretched many miles of cornfields, studded with other villages, steep-red-roofed like Kerval. The people were so courteous, so kind, so full of poetry and imagination that these things comforted them for Ireland. Somewhere in a fold of the cornfields was a Convent where the nuns made Breton lace and vestments for the poor churches and kept a little school, besides visiting the people and nursing the sick and feeding the hungry. They

wore blue and white robes, and each sister had a crucifix on her breast, and a rosary by her side.

They were charming, these sisters of the Holy Infancy, in their mixture of extreme simplicity and shrewdness. Sometimes in summer ladies came to board with them, often the last people one would have expected to find there—women of rank, worldlings, from Paris, from London, making the retreat there for the good of their souls.

One of these ladies, Lady Eversley, brought news of Bawn in her new estate. She was from Christopher's county and the information came after one or two tentative remarks on the part of Lady de Burgh.

"Oh, so you know Sir Christopher. Tell me—do you know who his wife was? There is a mystery, and I am *intrigued* to discover it. A beautiful creature, but rather cold-looking. A little coldness is best with a man like that. He ought to be our member, of course, but he let the Radical slip in. The Party will never forgive him. We have a romantic story that Lady Damer was dying and he fled to her dying bed, pitching the party cause to the deuce, that he prevailed on her not to die but to marry him instead, that he carried her off round the world and brought her back perfectly restored to health. He is devoted to her. I hear she and the Dowager do not hit it off. I am not surprised. The Dowager has no soul to make and she approaches her sixtieth year."

A little bell had rung then, and Lady Eversley who was never in time for anything at home had flown to one of the exercises of *la retraite*, without wait-

ing for an answer to her question, and they had not met again.

Long before this time Bridget had made her way to Kerval, appearing quite unexpectedly one day.

"You won't shut me out now I'm here," she had said to Lady de Burgh, humble but defiant. "I thought if I was to write may be you'd tell me not to come,—but you won't send me back again. I don't want any wages, but only to be wid you and the child I nursed. I'm not goin' next or nigh Bawn to make a show of her wid a poor ignorant old woman like me for her mother. I'm thinkin' her husband wouldn't like it much if I was to come and settle down near as Bawn wanted me to. I'll be happy enough wid you, my Lady, knowin' that Bawn's well cared for, for it's only truth that the sun shines out of her to Sir Christopher, though that's a quare sayin' too."

After this long speech she consented to have some food, and being done with that necessary matter, demanded the key of the linen cupboard from Jeanne, and in a few hours' time was sitting in the room she had chosen for her own, with piles of household linen and undergarments beside her, looking as much at home as in the nurseries at Castle Morrogh.

Her first impression of Jeanne being that "that wan had too much ould chat out of her," she negotiated with the kitchen only through Keogh, who was becoming quite a French speaker.

It was in the second summer of their stay at Kerval that the Château in the village street was occupied after standing empty for a long time. Madame de Guérin had come back with the young Count who had

emerged from the trouble in Algiers a broken man, with all the life and brilliance and gaiety crushed out of him. M. Raoul had come home to die. It had been his desire, and his mother had given it to him, as she would have given him anything on earth he asked, if she could by any possibility procure it for him. So the Château was opened, and the air and sun let into the closed mustily-smelling rooms, and the overgrown gardens were put in order and the Château underwent a great cleaning and polishing up: and when all was in order M. Raoul came home.

The households soon became friendly. The friendships had to come soon if at all, for M. Raoul was in a great hurry to be gone and there was so little time.

He lay in the *chaise longue* in the garden, his young body showing a gaunt outline under the silken coverlet, his face, which had escaped uninjured, delicately handsome. When he was not exhausted from pain it was easy to see in his face the boy he had been—bright, eager, gentle, gay. His eyes under the fine brows had a haunting suggestion for Mary. She drew her mother's attention to it—Yes, M. Raoul was like someone.

It flashed first upon Mary. Why—of course—it was Maurice. Just so slim, so elegant, so graceful must this heroic boy have been before he had been crushed under the wheels of battle. He had more colour naturally than Maurice. His dark hair grew in a point on his forehead as Maurice's did not; there were other differences, but the likeness persisted. It gave an added poignancy to the affection which Mary and her mother came to have for the dying boy,

and their acute sympathy for the mother who was watching her last child die and refusing pity because he died *pour la France.*

The end came in September. There had been a crowded Requiem for M. Raoul in the grey stone church on the sand-dunes, to which came M. l'Êvêque besides many Curés and Abbés and Vicaires, and the village for one day had laid aside its cheerful business and went in dreadful blacks to the ceremony and afterwards to the funeral.

Mary and her mother had knelt in the seat behind that occupied by Madame and her relatives many of whom had come from a distance. The ceremony had lain heavy on Mary's heart. It should have been a military funeral, only that M. Raoul had taken so many months to die. The tricolor should have draped the coffin, his charger been led in the funeral procession. It had all been very sombre. The "black" Mass and the bier before the altar with the coffin upon it, the airless and crowded church in the burning day, the dreadful French mourning which made the handsome people drearily sombre; Mary's heart cried out against all this funereal pageantry for the boy who had smiled himself into eternity, who had never complained, who had died with as high a heart as he had lived. She had felt all the time as though her soul cried in dumb protest, "Raoul is not dead," as though the heavy black of the pall, of the people's mourning, answered her "He is dead."

She came out of the church pale and half-fainting. She and her mother went back to Kerval. The rela-

tives and the clerics were enjoying the funeral-baked meats at the Château. There was no place for them.

Mary was glad to escape from the black procession of people returning from the graveside, so unlike the picturesque lively people of every day. They would be decking M. Raoul's grave with china wreaths under glass shades and beadwork ornaments. Dreadful things, so incongruous with the majesty of the Cross blown one way by the sea-wind which made a forest of leaning crosses of the graveyard.

She made her mother lie down in a room overlooking the sea by an open window, and bathed her forehead with Eau de Cologne. Some loneliness seemed to have come down upon them this day of the funeral of M. Raoul. The very hot weather was the last of the summer. There would be the autumn and then the wild winter of shipwrecks, and the drowned sailors would be flung up on the beach to be followed by long funeral processions. Several coffins would lie before the altar in the church previous to being carried to the graveyard which was always needing new land for graves.

Mary was suddenly desperately lonely.

"Mamma," she said. "Could we go away from Kerval for a time? I am growing nervy. I feel frightened of the graves and the loneliness."

Lady de Burgh drew the girl's face down to her and kissed it.

"I might have known it," she said. "You are too lonely."

"And you, mamma?"

"There has not been a day for a long time past

in which I have not been homesick. At first I thought as well of Kerval as any other place, seeing your father could not be with me. Now I am starved for home. You must go to Castle Morrogh as Mrs. Van Brunt has urged you to. I know you want to see Castle Morrogh more than any place on earth. I could not go there because it would kill me to leave it again, but I might take Bridget and wait for you in some quiet place on the Irish coast. I should be happy enough being there."

"The Curé says the tapestries are valuable. If they were to be sold. There are the snuff-boxes. . ."

"The Vicomte loved to think of his heirlooms in my hands. I have been thinking about it. Sooner or later I knew you would want to leave Kerval. What has it for a young thing like you? Give me time to think."

Mary went out with Shot. Life was suspended for the day in the village where the splendid looking fellows of every-day life were like so many undertaker's men in their ill-fitting black clothes. The grannies wore their little black shawls. In the distance she caught sight of a group leaving the Château, all black from head to foot.

The sight made her turn away. She took a path through the cornfields which led her out on the road that went to Morbihan. Surrounded by the golden miles of stubble dotted over with stooks of corn, she found a Calvary and sat down on the shelf that ran round it to rest.

It was certainly very warm. There was a golden haze over the sea. The burnt gold of the harvest

fields was over-arched by a steely sky. But now that it was afternoon the wind was coming up from the sea. It was lifting the dust on the long white road to Morbihan, by which very seldom visitors came to Kerval.

She sat with her elbows on her knees, her face resting on her hands, her eyes looking out with a curious intensity. For nearly two years now this place had been her home. When first she had come she had asked for no other. Her life had been sick. Now she had recovered. She was well once again. Kerval had got on her nerves. From her window to-night she would see all the tall crosses blown one way by the wind, and think of M. Raoul, so gentle, so gay even in his dying, there, with the coffin lid over his face.

Oh, if she was going to have thoughts like that her second state might be worse than her first. It was this strange place. She had never been afraid at home. She had not been frightened of the vault in the wood or the peasants' tales concerning its influence. She had put away from her that striking of the clock before her father's death, which she held to be unworthy of a Christian. She had never been afraid. Oh, if this creepy thing was going to come upon her the sooner she was out of Kerval the better. That way madness lies. She could laugh at the superstitions of her own people. She could not endure the Breton superstitions. They made the hair of her head stand up. It was too lonely for two women in that place on the cliff, beaten on by many storms. She was sick for home, for the people, the things she

had grown up amongst. And she thought she saw something of the pain of exile in the long looks with which Bridget regarded her when she imagined herself unobserved. Keogh had said to her that very morning, " Glory be to goodness, Miss Mary. I do be wonderin' how things is gettin' on at Castle Morrogh, at all."

She looked along the white road to Morbihan and far away she saw a thick whirl of dust. Something—someone—coming to Kerval. She watched it with idle curiosity saying to herself that the time might come when such a happening as something arriving at Kerval from Morbihan and the world beyond might be excitement enough for a day. She was suddenly intolerant of the foreign life. Kerval began to enclose her as the cage the bird. Presently she would be like the starling in Sterne crying " I can't get out, I can't get out."

The whirl of dust came on its way. There was nothing else to be seen except some splendid white geese feeding among the stubble. The peasants were all down in the village making a melancholy festival of the day which should end for many of them in too much cider or too many cognacs with their café and a bad head in the morning.

Nearer came the whirl of dust. It was a rickety fiacre drawn by a wretched horse. There was one passenger beside the driver who was making his Rosinante gallop.

In another moment it would have passed her. Suddenly she heard the call—" Arrêtez ! Halte ! "

The fiacre pulled up sharply and the passenger got

out; he was white with dust, or would have been white if one could have seen the dust on the light grey of his clothes. He had a rose in his button-hole. Despite the dust the newcomer had something of an air of being exceedingly well-dressed.

He came to her, holding out his hand.

"I have come back from California," he said, "and I could not resist running over to see you and Lady de Burgh."

"Maurice!" she cried, and the immense joy of the recognition was in her face and voice.

"Will Lady de Burgh give me a lodging for the night?" he asked. "May I send on this fellow with my bag? I may? Then we can walk down. I have eaten enough dust for a lifetime."

After the fiacre had gone on its way they stood looking at each other for sheer pleasure, with so many things to say that they did not know where to begin.

"What were you thinking of when I caught sight of you?" he asked at last.

"First—of who could be coming to Kerval from the outside world. Second—that the time would come when the sight of a vehicle approaching would be an immense excitement. While it came I should wonder who it was going to Kerval, and after it had passed I should go on wondering many things. To-day I have come to the end of my tether. I want to go home."

"Why, I have wanted the same thing," he said. "But, of course, I stuck it while Honoria and Fitzmaurice went round the world. They have come back with a small Fitzmaurice, who is the idol of

both. Did you know that my brother-in-law had bought Castle Morrogh from your cousin who succeeded? He has just completed the contract. Of course he will not turn out Mr. Van Brunt and his charming daughter-in-law. I don't think he will be much at Castle Morrogh. He confesses that even in the country of his fathers he did not like the wind and the rain. They are building a new house for themselves and their precious heir—near Dublin. They will come and go between Dublin and Monterey."

"And—Castle Morrogh? What will they do with it?"

They had turned to go down the hill.

"He has plans for the country around Castle Morrogh, to keep the people at home. He says there is a great fortune in the bogs. And the industries, —he will set the people weaving and spinning again. Oh, he is a Don Quixote. He will have it that there is money in it. He is certainly rich enough to afford experiments."

"But Castle Morrogh?" she said again.

"He thinks I can represent him over there. He has tried to infuse me with his energy and his hope. Perhaps he has succeeded. Castle Morrogh is to be mine."

She looked at him, a joyous excitement lighting her face.

"Yours, Maurice?"

"And yours, if you will. I've kept away a long time. You know that I am your slave. Could you take me with Castle Morrogh? Your mother—you know how I adore her. . . ."

"You talk as though I needed to be bribed," she said. "You foolish boy! Take me! Forget that I was—oh, we will not talk about it. I have wanted you, Maurice. You were always my dear friend."

They kissed with none to see them in the vast solitude of the wheat-fields. Then they went down the hill together.

THE END

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